

# THE LONDON READER

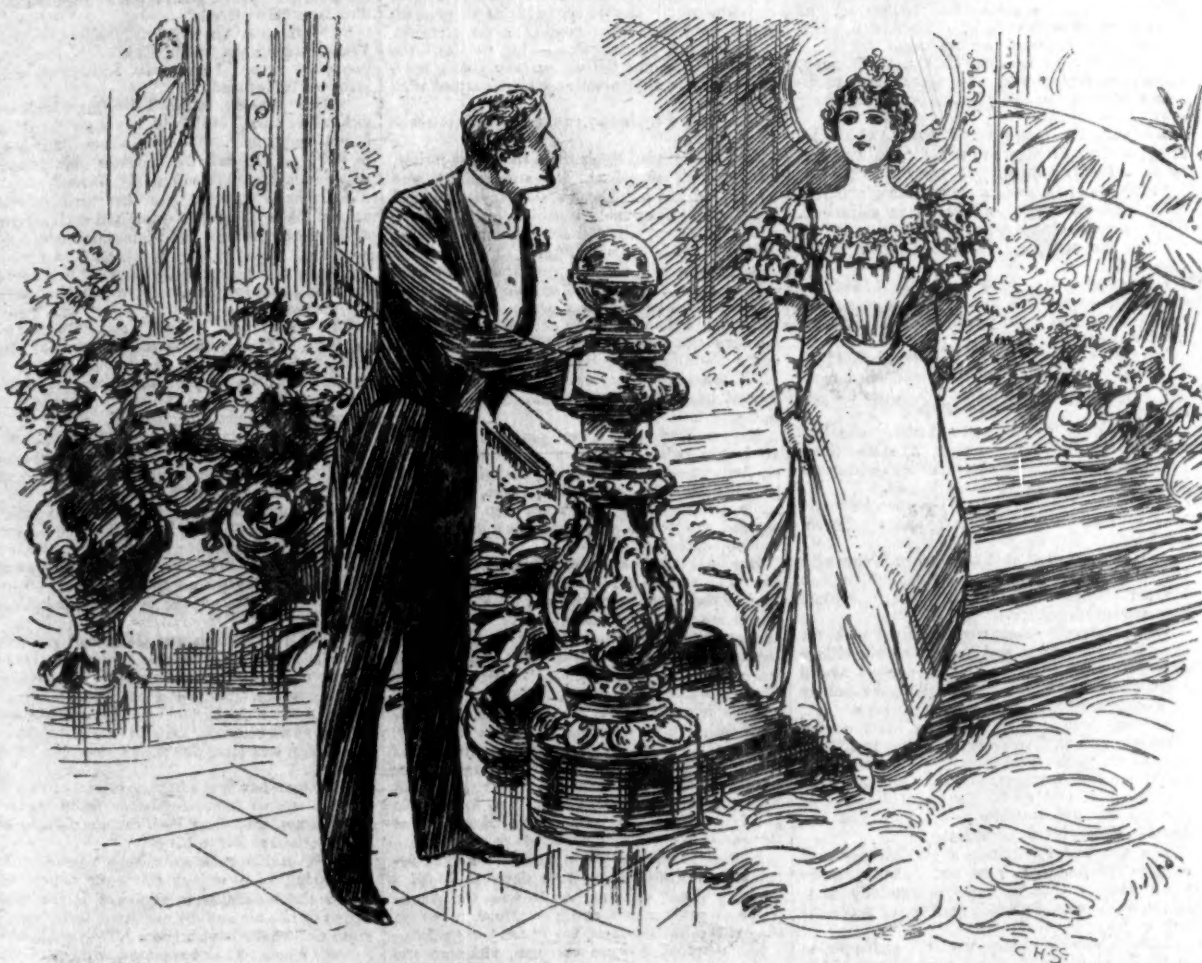
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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



VIOLET LOOKED RADIANTLY LOVELY ON THE NIGHT OF HER BIRTHDAY.

## UNLIKE OTHER GIRLS.

### [A NOVELETTE.]

#### CHAPTER I.

"AUNT ALICE writes to say that she is coming to us for a few weeks, papa, and that she will bring Julia with her," remarked Violet Stanwick to her father, as they sat at breakfast one cold morning in January. "Julia has not been well, and Aunt Alice thinks country air will do her more good than going to the seaside."

"The fact is," said Mr. Stanwick, sarcastically, "if Julia went to the seaside it would entail extra expense, whereas coming here costs nothing beyond the railway fare. I never knew your aunt to mention her real motive for doing anything in my life, Violet. When are we to expect our self-invited guests?"

"To-morrow. They will be in time for my birthday ball on the twentieth."

"Of course. Do you suppose they have omitted to take that into consideration? The Shifttons are down to everything."

"Don't be uncharitable, papa!" cried Violet, mirthfully, as she rose from the table. "We can easily find room for them, and a little pleasure will do Julia good, poor girl! They can't afford to go out much, you know!"

"What are you going to do with yourself this morning, pet?"

"When I have discussed household matters with Mrs. Veener, I mean to drive into the village to see some of my poor people."

"I have told you repeatedly that I object to your visiting them so frequently, and listening to all their complaints and troubles," said Richard Stanwick, peevishly. "I wish you to see only the bright, sunny side of existence at present. I won't have you saddened by the sight of other people's sorrows. It's the curate's place to visit them. Goodness knows I subscribe liberally enough to all the local charities!"

"The curate does visit them, papa, but I like

to do what little I can as well," replied Violet, gently. "You speak as if I am to be exempt from all sorrow and suffering—and that is impossible!"

"They are not likely to trouble you, child," he retorted, sharply, with a vague fear in his voice. "I can protect you from them by the power of wealth. Money, Violet, is a powerful safeguard against misfortune. Possessing that, we can defy nearly all the evils to which human nature is subject!"

"Papa, don't speak in such a defiant strain," pleaded the girl, with a slight shiver. "It is like daring misfortune to come to us, and we are so happy—so very happy now!"

"Nonsense! You always were a strange girl, Violet. There's another proof of your being unlike other girls with plenty of money at command," he continued, as a rough-looking sheep-dog, with a kind, sensible, old head, and the veriest stump of a tail, entered the breakfast-room. "Instead of having a pug, or a St. Bernard, or something else that costs money, you

attach yourself to that ridiculous old cur, and make a pet of him!"

"Dash isn't handsome, I'll admit," said Violet, fondling the ungainly favourite, "but he's the dearest old dog in the world, and the most faithful!"

Dash accepted the compliment and a biscuit at the same time.

Violet went away to hold a discussion with the housekeeper, and Richard Stanwick, adjourning to what he was pleased to call his study, settled down to an undisturbed perusal of the *Times*.

He was a self-made man—a wealthy parvenu—who, from being a mere retail tradesman, had risen to affluence late in life—too late to adapt himself to his changed surroundings.

He had bought Langton Hall, near Torquay, on retiring from trade, and endeavoured to interest himself in the pursuits of an ordinary country gentleman.

But with the long-coveted wealth within his grasp, and ample leisure to enjoy it, he was very far from feeling happy.

Violet, well-educated, graceful, accustomed to refined, luxurious surroundings from childhood, felt in nowise embarrassed or ill at ease in the position she occupied. With her father it was different.

His bringing up, early associations, and the struggling years—the poverty and care he had experienced—had totally unfitted him to mingle in good society.

Why, his butler—a grand, pompous, individual, of whom he stood in secret awe—looked more like the master of Langton Hall than its real owner.

Yet Richard Stanwick was slavishly obedient to the demands of his new rank. At stated times he filled the house with guests, although he never breathed freely till they had departed.

He drank wine and praised it, when he would have revelled in a pint of porter and a "church-warden."

Never happy or at ease save when alone with his daughter, the meagre, spare-built, little man insisted obstinately upon adhering to the pomp that caused his misery.

When the ponies came round Violet took the reins from the groom and started for the village at a brisk pace, enjoying, as only perfect health and a heart free from care can enjoy, the beauty of a clear, frosty, sombre, winter morning.

She was a very pretty girl—even other women acknowledged this reluctantly. She had dark, long-lashed, blue eyes, soft, wavy, auburn hair, small regular features, and a complexion of blended lilacs and roses. The rich darkness of her fur cap and sealskin jacket enhanced her delicate warm-tinted loveliness.

The girl and the ponies, a charming pair of dappled-grey, named Soda and Brandy, made up a picture that passers-by—especially masculine ones—regarded with feelings of profound admiration.

Violet Stanwick's heart was full of happiness as she drove into the village to visit some of her pensioners—the space beneath the carriage-seat was filled with useful gifts.

The day after to-morrow would be her nineteenth birthday.

The occasion was to be celebrated by a dinner-party and a ball.

Thanks to their wealth, the Stanwicks were well received by the county people, and their invitations seldom met with a refusal.

Violet was looking forward to this particular ball with unusual delight, blended with a little girlish shirking, not unnatural under the circumstances.

Sir Charles Annesley, her *uncle*, whose estate adjoined Langton Hall, would be present; and their engagement, only a fortnight old, would, as it were, become public property for the first time on the night of the ball.

Violet permitted her thoughts to rest upon it with shy, sweet pleasure.

She was in love with the handsome baronet—at least, so she firmly believed—and in her eyes he passed as the representative of noble, high-born, chivalrous manhood.

A thorough man of the world, his easy debonnaire love-making, breathing, without any

apparent effort, the very spirit of devotion for the woman he would fain honour by making her his wife, had won Violet's heart. No man so handsome, so gifted, so high-bred, had ever crossed her path before.

He fascinated her, and she had succumbed beneath the spell, wondering a little sometimes in her glad humility that he had thought her worthy to share his honoured name, and to go through life by his side.

There were not wanting people who declared that Annesley House and the lands belonging to it were deeply mortgaged—that only a rich marriage would enable Sir Charles to save his patrimonial acres from coming to the hammer. Others—equally charitable—hinted at the strange life he had led abroad as a young man, and the many unpleasant anecdotes coupled with his name.

But these disquieting rumours failed to reach Violet's ears.

Her father, glad to obtain a titled son-in-law, had willingly sanctioned the engagement, and no *exposé* of her lover's shortcomings had brought him down from the high pedestal upon which, in her absolute trust and fond, adoring pride, Violet had placed him.

She drove to the country station on the next day to meet her aunt and cousin. The express had arrived when she got there, and a little confusion of greetings and embraces took place between the three ladies. Then Mrs. Shifton and Julia followed Violet into the carriage, the lilliputian groom jumped up behind, and the ponies' heads were turned in the direction of home.

Mrs. Shifton was a well-preserved, middle-aged lady, with a quantity of brown hair not all her own—save in the sense that she had paid for it—a fixed colour, and a sweet, perpetual smile, which those who knew her intimately averred was not to be accepted as a proof of unbroken amiability.

Her husband was a struggling barrister, and his wife's ambition to shine in society did not tend to lessen his pecuniary anxieties. With six daughters and a very small income Mrs. Shifton endeavoured to keep up with people whose means greatly exceeded her own, regardless of the humiliating shifts and contrivances to which she was compelled to resort.

Julia, her eldest daughter, was the beauty of the family. She possessed a certain haughty, defiant style of good looks, on the strength of which her mother had predicted a success for her when she first came out. But Julia had been out several seasons now, and an eligible *parti* seemed as far off as ever. Her want of fortune kept all but detrimental at a distance.

Had she been brought up under different circumstances Julia might have developed into a noble, gracious woman. As it was, the atmosphere of petty deceit and subterfuge in which she existed had rendered her bitter and cynical.

She despised it from her soul, although she could not escape from it. Julia was painfully aware of the advantages Violet enjoyed as contrasted with her own, and a dislike, almost amounting to hatred, had grown up in her heart for her wealthy, beautiful cousin.

"I hope the short notice I gave you of our coming has not put you to any inconvenience, my dearest Violet," said Mrs. Shifton, effusively; "I should be so sorry if that were the case. Julia preferred Brighton, but I knew the country air would do her more good. Laura and Bessie pleaded hard to be allowed to come with us, but I would not hear of it. It would have been imposing upon your hospitality."

"You have not put me to any inconvenience, auntie," Violet replied, simply. "It was a pity to disappoint Bessie and Laura. I could have found room for them as well."

"I might write to them to join us in a few days, then?" said Mrs. Shifton, who had intended doing so all along. "Now I want to know all about your engagement, my dear. I was so delighted to hear of it." She had burst into tears and stormed at her own girls for being still unengaged. "Sir Charles belongs to one of the best families in the county, and he is such a distinguished-looking, handsome fellow. We met

him last year at Lady Vavasour's ball. You remember the tall, fine, fair-haired man who danced with you several times, Julia?"

"There were so many men of that description present, mamma, that I can hardly be expected to single Sir Charles out from among the rest," said Julia, languidly, determined to evince but slight interest in Violet's engagement, which had already cost her a sharp pang of envy.

"I believe the Annesley estate is somewhat encumbered," said Mrs. Shifton, suavely; "but doubtless things will come right when once you are married. Have you decided when the wedding is to take place?"

"In—in about six months, I believe," faltered Violet, blushing. "Sir Charles is rather an impatient wooer. I shall want Julia to act as my principal bridesmaid."

"With pleasure, unless I become a bride myself before then," said Julia, quietly; "and that is not very likely. We portionless damsels get passed by. It is only heiresses like yourself who obtain husbands so quickly, Violet."

Julia knew how to send her little poisoned arrows home to their destination with unerring skill. Never before had Violet doubted the disinterested nature of the baronet's love for her. Those words "heiresses like yourself" rankled in her mind, unsuspecting as it was, and refused to be expelled.

"In six months' time!" said Mrs. Shifton, sweetly. "Then your marriage will take place in the summer, my love. I suppose you will go on the Continent to spend your honeymoon. Sir Charles is well known at Monaco. You must not allow him to go near the tables."

"Do you mean to imply that Sir Charles is a gambler, Aunt Alice?" asked Violet, sharply, despising that lady's vague hints, and determined for once to bring her to the point.

"My dearest child, no; I meant nothing of the kind," said Mrs. Shifton, fearing lest she had gone too far. "Many people play who are not habitual gamblers. But, of course, after his marriage Sir Charles will give up all these bachelor delights, and settle down to a quiet domestic life upon his own estate."

When Mrs. Shifton and Julia had arrived at the Hall, and gone to their respective rooms, Violet, thankful to be alone for half an hour, went into the library and took up a volume of Shelley, which she turned over without reading.

That short conversation on the way back from the station had sown doubt and suspicion in her mind.

Was there any truth in the statement that Sir Charles was so fond of Monaco, or in the still more cruel hint that her fortune formed her principal attraction in his eyes?

Violet's noble, generous nature blamed her for harbouring such unjust thoughts against one whom she had hitherto regarded as the incarnation of honour and disinterested love; yet she could not wholly banish them. They rubbed the delicate bloom off her happiness, and gave rise to a feeling of vague insecurity.

She looked radiantly lovely on the night of her birthday as she floated downstairs to welcome her guests, dressed in robes of filmy blue, clasped here and there with pearls—pearls confining her wavy, abundant tresses of brown hair.

Sir Charles Annesley, a tall, fair man, with fine grey eyes and drooping moustache, lay laid her at the foot of the wide oak staircase, and drew her with him into the conservatory.

"My birthday present, darling!" he explained, as he clasped a splendid diamond bracelet on her round white arm, regarding her fondly and proudly the while. "How lovely you are to-night, my Violet! You will outshine every other woman present, and that, as hostess, is not fair, although I am well pleased that it should be so."

"Charles, you will laugh at me when you hear what I am about to say," began Violet, timidly. "Sometimes I am foolish enough to fear that the course of our love has run too smoothly to last. We have met with no difficulties, and you know the old proverb says that is never the case with true love."

"Would you throw a doubt upon ours because there is no tyrannical father, no intriguing mother,



to come between us and thwart our happiness!" said the baronet, lightly.

"Not exactly. Only I read in an old book the other day that poverty and sorrow are the tests by which true love is proved. I wonder if the writer spoke from experience!"

"He may have done," said Sir Charles, carelessly. "Poverty and love in a four-roomed cottage, though, one sees to most advantage on the stage. They don't work well in real life. The unpaid butcher's bill and the rent for the love of a cottage six months behind soon cause husband and wife to discover faults in each other unnoticed before, and to regret their rash, ill-advised proceeding in getting married upon next to nothing a year."

"Will you promise not to be offended if I ask you a question?" said Violet, with a great sinking at heart caused by his words.

"Certainly."

"Would—would you have asked me to be your wife if instead of being what I am—the heiress of Langton Hall—I had been only a poor governess, or a companion with a pitiful salary?" she said, earnestly, putting the question to him in the frank sincerity of her nature.

In spite of his promise not to be offended a slight frown darkened the baronet's face.

"Why trouble yourself and me with such foolish suppositions, Violet?" he said, reproachfully. "You are not a poor governess, or companion, thank Heaven! In any position I could not have failed to admire you, *ma belle*, although circumstances must always govern a man to a certain extent in his choice of a wife. If you talk thus I shall think that you have lost faith in me. You have not. Then I will forgive you, and take my compensation in kisses. Come, darling, or your guests will wonder what has happened to delay you."

Violet went down, but the sunny smile had left her eyes, and a chill north wind seemed to have slammed the door upon her recent unsuspecting happiness.

## CHAPTER II.

SOMETHING was amiss with her father. Violet came to this conclusion a few days after the birthday ball. He looked worn and haggard; he was constantly receiving letters and telegrams from town, and his manner became daily more peevish and unreasonable.

He would never consent to discuss business matters with his daughter. Any attempt on her part to win his confidence met with a repulse.

Had he been speculating rashly with his large fortune in the attempt to double it? Richard Stanwick was inordinately fond of money, and he had once or twice made a remark in Violet's hearing that rendered this supposition of hers not unlikely to be true.

Even Violet, who knew but little of such things, was aware that a great financial crisis, an epoch in the history of the Stock Exchange and the Paris Bourse, had arrived. Several well-known old-established houses had stopped payment; more than one bank had succumbed beneath the pressure brought to bear upon it. The daily papers were constantly announcing some fresh failure, and increasing the panic among investors, large and small.

Was her father involved to any great extent in these disastrous enterprises? Violet tried to ascertain, but Richard Stanwick gave her only ambiguous replies.

Women, in his opinion, were not capable of understanding business matters; besides, he did not care to acknowledge how rashly he had speculated with his large capital.

"Go away now, my dear," he said, wearily, when Violet entered his study, where he sat in front of a table littered with papers, and sought to draw from him some explicit information with regard to the anxiety that evidently oppressed him. "I cannot explain my business transactions to you, Violet; they are much too complicated for your little head. Yes, I have had some losses lately, but not to any great extent. I shall retrieve them again presently; I must, I cannot fail to do so. Go away now, I

am busy. I will join you in the drawing-room later on."

And Violet was compelled to leave him, feeling dissatisfied and uneasy. Surely small losses would not have produced such an effect upon him! Was some terrible trouble looming cloud-like over them in the immediate distance?

Going to her father's study one morning to ask him to write a cheque for household expenses a terrible cry rang through the house, startling all who heard it.

The guests of both sexes, and all the servants, from the pompous butler to the little kitchen-maid, rushed in the direction of the study.

They found Violet sitting on the floor, holding her father's grey head in her lap. He had been stretched on the floor insensible with an open telegram lying beside him when she entered the study.

The hastily-summoned doctor declared Richard Stanwick to have had a paralytic stroke of a very severe kind. Speechless and senseless he was removed to his room, Violet acting as his sole nurse.

Mrs. Shifton, pale and frightened at this terrible visitation which had befallen her brother-in-law, picked up the telegram which had fallen from his hand, and read it.

She could not understand the technical terms in which the message was couched, but she gathered from them that one at least of Richard Stanwick's investments had proved a total failure, involving many others in ruin. Ruin! Surely that hateful word was not to be thought of in connection with prosperous Richard Stanwick?

What could have induced the once cautious man to change his safe investments for such mad, headlong speculation?

But Richard Stanwick was not in a condition to be questioned with regard to his doings. He lay there stricken to death in the shaded room, with his daughter, full of grief and sympathy, watching over him.

The people staying at Langton Hall wisely departed, leaving its owners undisturbed in their new sorrow. Sir Charles Annesley came every day, but Violet scarcely saw him; she could not leave the sick room save for a few moments, and her lover had to fall back upon Mrs. Shifton for news and some insight into the real state of affairs.

Sir Charles was becoming very anxious. Rumour said that Richard Stanwick was ruined. The failure of a gigantic mining speculation, that was to have converted the shareholders into millionaires, following hard upon other losses, had dragged the rich man down.

Should this prove true, Violet, instead of being an heiress, would come to her husband absolutely unendowed, as it were, depending upon him for voluntary contributions. A nice look-out this for an embarrassed man with a mortgaged estate, which he had hoped to redeem by means of a wealthy marriage.

Sir Charles cursed his ill-luck, swore at Richard Stanwick under his breath for being such a mad fool, and waited as patiently as he could for the unpromising dénouement.

It was not long in arriving. Richard Stanwick revived a little on the fourth day from his seizure, and recognised his daughter.

"How long have I been ill, Violet?" he inquired, feebly.

"Four days, papa dearest," she replied, bending over him fondly. "Oh! papa, papa!" losing her self-control, "try to live for my sake! I cannot bear to lose you!"

Richard Stanwick shook his grey head.

"I am going, Violet," he said, brokenly. "This blow has been too much for me. To lose all, every penny, after such long years of working and saving in order to amass money! I would far rather die than face poverty again. It is of you I am thinking, child, not of myself. Like my investments, I shall very soon be a dead failure; but you! Oh, my Violet, that I should have brought you to this! I ought to double the fortune you would inherit, whereas I have madly sung it all away, and left you penniless. Can you forgive me, child?"

"There can be no question of forgiveness

between us, dear," said Violet, pressing her fresh young cheek against his withered one. "You have always been the kindest and best of fathers. You would not have risked your hard-earned money but for me. Do not let the thought of it distress your mind any longer. Let us talk of something else."

"I can't, Violet. I must make some provision for you ere I die. Tell them to send at once for Perry. We ought, between us, to snatch enough from such a colossal wreck to provide for you. There is no time to be lost. Send for him at once. And I should also like to see Sir Charles Annesley."

Long before Mr. Perry, Richard Stanwick's solicitor, could reach Langton Hall its owner had breathed his last; and Violet, locked in her own room, was sobbing her heart out in the first bitterness of her first real sorrow, refusing to be consoled.

When the quiet funeral was over, and Richard Stanwick's affairs were thoroughly gone into, his bankruptcy was established beyond doubt.

In the hope of retrieving his losses by one lucky coup he had continued to speculate, and fortune had been persistently against him. The mining affair had only served to complete a ruin already begun.

He was deeply in debt too. Langton Hall would have to be sold in order to cover the dead man's liabilities. There would be nothing for Violet to inherit of all the fortune that her father had amassed.

Unless friends were kind enough to offer her a shelter she would have to go out into the world to earn her own living. Richard Stanwick's wealth had exploded like a great windbag, leaving only emptiness behind.

Mrs. Shifton undertook to acquaint Violet with the sad change in her circumstances. She did not wish the girl to become a burden upon her, and, with her usual keen, worldly wisdom, she determined to keep Sir Charles Annesley true to his engagement as the best means of providing for Violet.

Mrs. Shifton made her way to Violet's boudoir, a charming little room, upholstered in peacock-blue velvet, with peacock-feather decorations.

Violet was sitting by the fire, gazing into its depths with weary, wistful eyes, her delicate beauty gaining a fresh charm from her dark mourning robes.

She was so unused to sorrow, poor child, that when it came and took her by the hand she could have cried out as if suffering a cruel injustice.

Only those whom sorrow never leaves understand how to bear its grim presence without a murmur.

"Did your father ever admit to you that he was in difficulties, Violet?" said Mrs. Shifton, presently. "Mr. Perry tells me that his affairs are in a dreadfully complicated condition."

"He would never tell me anything till he was on his death-bed," said Violet, sadly. "Then he acknowledged that he had lost a great deal of money, that I should be very poorly off when all claims had been met. But what does it matter? If there is enough for me to live upon I shall be content."

"My dear, you may as well know the worst at once," continued Mrs. Shifton, sensibly. "It is useless to keep you in ignorance of it. Langton Hall will have to be sold, and when the creditors are paid there will be no balance remaining over for you. I'd ed, the sale of the estate will not cover the liabilities incurred. You will be absolutely penniless, Violet, without either home or income."

The girl's fair face blanched as she heard this, the tears sprang to her eyes. She had not anticipated such utter ruin.

"What is to become of me, auntie?" she said, mournfully.

"My home will be yours until you are married," replied Mrs. Shifton, suavely. "I have told Sir Charles this, and—he is quite approve of the arrangement."

"But my poverty may have the effect of cancelling my engagement," said Violet, bitterly. "I was an heiress when Sir Charles proposed to me,

I am only a pauper now. The change may not be without its effect upon him."

"Nonsense, Violet," retorted Mrs. Shifton, quickly. "He is bound in honour to make you his wife. He cannot avoid doing so unless you give him a loophole, and permit him to escape. I sincerely hope that no foolish high-flown ideas will prevent you from holding him to his word."

"And marrying him against his will!" said Violet, quietly. "What a desirable future you are planning for me, dear aunt!"

"A better one than you can expect to have if you let him go. Apart from your marriage you have simply no prospects, Violet. Your own welfare is at issue, and if you refuse to act in a sensible manner, to become Lady Annealey, I really don't know what is to become of you, without a penny to call your own."

With this cheering remark Mrs. Shifton swept from the room, leaving Violet to digest her words at leisure.

A sharper pain pierced the girl's desolate heart as she sat there motionless, still gazing into the fire.

Sir Charles, as her affianced husband, was very dear to her. Willingly would she have thrown herself into his arms to be sheltered there had she but been sure of his love under such widely-altered circumstances remaining unchanged.

This assurance, however, was far from being hers. He had once alluded in disparaging terms to a poor marriage, and branded it as a folly. Violet knew of his pecuniary embarrassments now; he had himself alluded to them since her father's death, while his manner towards her had lacked its usual loverlike warmth.

Keep him to his engagement against his will in order to provide herself with a home! Never! Violet's dark eyes flashed scornfully as her aunt's advice recurred to her. Anything but that. She would ascertain the truth ere long from his own lips. If her surmise proved correct, and he wished to be released from his engagement, she would restore his freedom without a reproachful word, and face the world with one illusion the less. Love! Did it really exist, save in the hearts of fathers and mothers? The poor counterfeit others offered her was unworthy of that sublime name.

Violet watched her opportunity. Taking advantage of the astute Mrs. Shifton's absence from the drawing-room one day when Sir Charles called, she nerved herself to the painful task of probing his love, and ascertaining his wishes with regard to their engagement.

"Langton Hall is to be sold," she began, quietly. "I suppose you are aware of that? I am going home with my aunt for the present. It is kind of her to take me, since I have no longer any means of my own."

"It's a wretched state of affairs," said the baronet, gloomily. "I wouldn't mind if I were not so awfully hard-up for money myself, Violet. But for both of us to be poor is—er—"

"Extremely embarrassing," said Violet, finishing his sentence for him. "On that account, perhaps, we had better agree to cancel our engagement. Your aversion to poverty is well-known to me. In my own person I am not afraid of it, but I have no desire to inflict it upon you against your will. I shall not hold you to your promise to marry me, Sir Charles, since my position has altered greatly for the worse, and I am no longer that enviable being, an heiress."

If she had secretly hoped for an indignant, loving disavowal of all mercenary motives, a refusal to accept the freedom thus offered to him from the baronet, she was bitterly disappointed.

In spite of his attempt to conceal it, a relieved expression crossed Sir Charles's fair, handsome, high-bred face.

"Violet, my poor generous darling!" he stammered, "I would fain make you my wife, regardless of circumstances. I love you, upon my soul, I do, as I have never loved any other woman. If I avail myself of your offer it is because I am powerless to act independently, and in accordance with my own wishes. I—"

"Excuses are unnecessary," said Violet, with a little quiver of mingled scorn and sorrow in her voice.

Her idol had fallen with a crash, exposing his

clay feet and general unworthiness to her disenchanted eyes.

"Henceforth," she continued, "our paths will lie far apart. We are not likely to meet again. You will take that back," slipping off her engagement ring, "and our projected union will take its place among the events that were not to be. Knowing what I do now I hardly regret it, although I have bought my knowledge very dear."

"You despise me as a fortune-hunter," said the baronet, angrily. He loved her as much as his selfish, worldly nature would permit of. It annoyed and pained him to lose her, especially under circumstances reflecting more or less upon his honour. Yet his love was not strong enough to keep him true to her in the face of adverse fortune. Being the one in fault of course he lost his temper, and assumed an injured air.

"Not altogether," she replied, frankly. "You would have married me had I asked you to do so from a sense of honour, but I could not permit that. I release you from your promise very willingly, Sir Charles. There is no reason why we should part bad friends."

"Even now," he began, remorsefully, "it is not too late to reconsider your determination."

"That would be folly, unless one could blot out what has just transpired. Good-bye, I will not detain you any longer. You may leave me to inform my aunt that our engagement is at an end."

Mrs. Shifton's wrath, on learning what her niece had thought proper to do, was intense. Never before had she addressed Violet in such angry, plain-spoken terms. It was the girl's first experience of her changed position and the many unpleasant attributes belonging to it.

"I can offer you a home for the present, Violet," she wound up by saying spitefully; "but I cannot promise to do so always. You have chosen to stand in your own light, and lose the chance of marrying well when it was yours. Girls who do such things must expect to rough it when they have no resources of their own."

"I shall not trouble you long, aunt," replied Violet, proudly. "It would grieve me to be a burden upon your hospitality; and no woman capable of earning her own living can truthfully be said to lack resources."

### CHAPTER III.

THE house in Belgravia to which a few weeks later on Violet accompanied her aunt and cousin was anything but an abode of domestic bliss.

The comfort of the entire household was sacrificed in order to maintain an imposing external appearance—to live in the same style as people possessing treble their income.

The petty shifts and often mean devices resorted to in order to accomplish this grand aim fairly astonished Violet.

The most importunate tradespeople were paid a little on account; the servants' wages were always more or less in arrears. When unusually hard-pressed Mrs. Shifton had frequently gone on a begging errand to her wealthy brother-in-law. Now this source had failed her, and she knew not where to look for another when her funds should once more be at a low ebb.

Violet, on arriving, was welcomed kindly by her uncle, a worn, harassed-looking man, and the only member of the Shifton family who really liked her.

Belle, Maud, Laura and Bessie Shifton, insipid young ladies with fair fluffy hair and very light blue eyes, gave their cousin but a cool reception.

Younger and fairer than themselves, coming to them under such altered circumstances, Violet's advent could hardly have been more undesirable. Ethel, a precocious dark-eyed girl of eleven, took an early opportunity of airing her sisters' sentiments upon this point in Violet's hearing.

Hitherto Violet had always visited the

Shiftons in the character of a favoured, petted guest. The best bedroom had been assigned to her, and the various petty domestic shifts and contrivances had been kept carefully in the background.

But, on this occasion, she was very quick to perceive the distinction drawn between the heiress and the penniless dependent woman she had become.

The room set aside for her was a dreary little place not far from the attic, commanding an extensive chimney-pot prospect. When she had washed her hands and brushed her hair Violet went down to join the others in the drawing-room. She heard with surprise a list of domestic grievances that Bella, the housekeeper during her mother's absence, was pouring into that lady's ear. Nothing of the kind had ever been alluded to in her presence before.

Dinner was a scrambling, uncomfortable meal, at which the fish came up almost in a state of nature, Mrs. Shifton sending it away, quite as a matter of course, to undergo a second frying. The young ladies wrangled with each other perpetually, and bitter little speeches flew across the table like squibs.

The Misses Shifton could appear amiable and loving when company was present, but among themselves they were the most disagreeable, jealous girls living.

Feeling weary after her long journey Violet withdrew long before the usual hour for retiring from the domestic circle, and sought the shelter of her own room.

And then she began to unpack some of the boxes and portmanteaus that littered it. Till now her maid had always performed that duty. Finding it devolve upon herself, Violet set about it with sudden, feverish energy, as if she feared to let her mind dwell upon the past till she was stronger and better able to face her new position in all its hard reality.

From the idolised daughter, the beloved young mistress whom everyone gladly obeyed, the head of her father's large establishment, she had become a needy, impoverished, obscure woman, the least important member of an unhappy, ill-regulated household. Such a terrible and unexpected reverse might have crushed a weaker nature; but Violet's temperament was strong and elastic, likely to rebound in time, even from the cruel blow she had sustained.

She had brought many pretty trifles with her from Langton Hall. These she arranged tastefully about the dingy room, rendering it more homelike and pleasant in appearance.

She unpacked a miniature strong-box, made of oak and clasped with steel. Unlocking it, Violet counted the money it contained.

Her father had always given her a liberal allowance, and she had spent it freely. Sometimes, however, there had remained a small balance in hand, which she consigned to the strong box, little dreaming how precious the money thus saved would one day be to her.

Twenty pounds, odd shillings! Well, it was not much, but with even this small resource at command she was not wholly dependent upon the Shiftons. Then she had several articles of jewellery which, if realised, would produce far more than twenty pounds.

A little comforted by this inventory of her worldly goods Violet went to bed, and enjoyed the deep, dreamless rest that not unfrequently follows excessive grief or fatigue.

It was very late ere she emerged from her room the next morning and descended to the breakfast-room in her simple black dress, relieved at the throat and wrists by frills of white laces.

Breakfast was still on the table, although empty egg shells and dirty cups proved that the meal was virtually over.

Bessie, who was lounging in an easy-chair reading a French novel when her cousin entered the room, rang the bell and told the sulky servant who answered it to bring fresh coffee and toast. She received Violet's apology for being late with tolerable good grace, and then went on with her novel.

Violet was trifling with some ham upon her plate—her healthy country appetite having forsaken her—when Mrs. Shifton appeared in a



morning wrapper, and a cap considerably the worse for wear.

"Good-morning, Violet. I hope you slept well last night," she said, rather coldly. "I did not send your breakfast up, because I never like to encourage young people in idle habits. Beside," turning to her daughter, "I have repeatedly asked you to superintend Ethel's music-lessons. The poor child is playing her exercises in frightful style, while you sit here reading. It is really too bad of you."

"I can't teach Ethel, mamma," said Bessie, carelessly. "She pays no attention to what I say. She is a tiresome, self-willed monkey. I don't believe anyone could teach her."

"She is not tiresome," retorted Mrs. Shifton, angrily, "only you and Bella are too indolent to save me the expense of a music-master. Violet, my dear," she continued, "you are a good musician, and I think you possess some patience. You would oblige me by giving Ethel a music-lesson every day. She is dreadfully backward, and masters charge so frightfully if you engage them. Perhaps you will spend an hour with her this morning, and then you can write some letters for me that must go by the next post."

It was evident that Mrs. Shifton did not intend her niece to remain long unemployed. Violet saw this, but she determined as long as she remained with her aunt to make no protest.

Rising from the breakfast-table she went to the dingy little room where Ethel was hanging away at the old school-room piano with energy worthy of a better cause.

After a brief struggle for the supremacy, Ethel was compelled to acknowledge her cousin's stronger will, and to accept her instruction. Unlike Bessie, Violet did not call her "a horrid little wretch" when she became rebellious. She only insisted quietly upon Ethel's doing as she was told, and the end of that music-lesson was an improvement on its commencement.

While Violet was writing her aunt's letters Mrs. Shifton was called away to hold an interview in the front hall with a stout, red-faced man, who insisted on the immediate settlement of that there little bill which had been so long standing.

Mrs. Shifton paid him something on account, and got rid of him, treating the matter as if it were an ordinary everyday occurrence. Then she called away to the work-room, where a shabby female in black and her own hard-worked maid were putting the mourning dresses together, with a little desultory help from Bella and Laura.

A few cutlets warmed up from last night's dinner, some watery potatoes, and the remains of a fossilized pudding, constituted the luncheon.

Mrs. Shifton would have deemed it a clear waste of time and money to provide a more comfortable meal for her family when no guests were expected. Mr. Shifton did not come home for luncheon. He went to his club instead, and Violet secretly envied him.

They were waited upon by Mrs. Shifton's new footman—an importation from the country upon which that lady prided herself vastly. The housemaid was his sister, and through her Mrs. Shifton had become aware that Timothy Hogben, then a ploughman, had a burning desire to distinguish himself as a London footman.

Ascertaining that he was tall and well grown, Mrs. Shifton had consented to take the ambitious youth on trial. She paid him only page-boy's wages, since he was quite ignorant of his new duties, while in return she secured the services of "six feet of tall footman," as Dickens aptly describes it.

Timothy, rechristened John, was a fresh-coloured, broad-shouldered, unsophisticated young man, not over-burdened with intelligence.

Mary must have coached her pupil well upon his arrival from the country with a big box and a bundle tied up in a checked handkerchief. He waited lunch without committing any solecisms, although, being in a high state of nervousness, he rattled the plate and glass like castanets, and narrowly escaped coming into the room head first, preceded by a flying dish, through Bella's poodle getting between his legs.

"Quite an acquisition," said Mrs. Shifton, in a tone of self-congratulation, when John had retired to the lower regions. The new footman was

another proof of her domestic acumen and genius for keeping up the best possible appearance at the least possible cost.

"We may as well bring some of the dress-making down to the drawing-room, girls," she continued, "and get on with it ourselves. It will all save expense. John," after ringing for that promising domestic, "if any ladies or gentlemen call this afternoon you are to say that we are not at home."

John stared aghast at this command.

Mrs. Shifton, thinking he had not properly understood her, impatiently repeated it.

"Excuse me, ma'am," he stammered, "but be I to say you're not at home when you're sittin' up here all the while! Be I to do that!"

"Certainly," said his mistress. "It is the customary thing when a lady does not wish to receive visitors. You will understand this when you have been longer in town."

"I can't do it, ma'am," said John, firmly. "I promised parson before I left home that if everybody else in London told me I wouldn't. I don't mind telling anybody as calls that you don't want to see them just at present, that it's not convenient, and they must come again. But to tell a downright lie I can't do it," repeated John, heroically, "and so I tell you plainly, ma'am."

The girls stared and laughed at this incarnation of morality in plum-coloured livery. Mrs. Shifton flew into a towering passion.

"Do you mean to say that you refuse to obey my orders?" she demanded, angrily.

"Yes, ma'am, if so be it's to give that message, sorry as I am to offend you. You see, it ain't true."

"Go downstairs, and tell your sister to come to me at once."

John disappeared in a state of great trepidation, to be replaced by his sister. Mrs. Shifton proceeded to inform the latter that unless her brother became alive to the nice distinction between a conventional lie, sanctioned by custom, and an ordinary one, he would return to his native village in less time than it had taken to get him away from it.

The uncomfortable, scrambling day seemed as if it would never come to an end. Violet felt that it would be impossible for her to go on living with the Shiftons for any length of time.

The quiet insolence of the elder girls, their frequent careless, unfeeling allusions to her great loss, and her aunt's cold, loveless manner, intensified day by day. As plainly as possible they intimated that Violet was one too many amongst them.

Her high spirit and sensitive heart could ill brook such treatment as this.

Without saying anything to her relatives Violet scanned the columns of the *Times* every morning to see if any situation were advertised likely to suit her. Governess or companion, which should it be! Of two evils the companionship seemed the lesser. In that capacity she would not be called upon to teach a lot of unruly children, while she would enjoy the pleasant sense of independency belonging to those who earn their own living.

Violet answered several advertisements without getting a reply. She was beginning to despair of success when she received a letter from a lady residing at Rose Villa, Blackheath, whose advertisement for a companion she had promptly responded to.

Miss Massinger proved to be a tall, thin acidulated maiden lady of uncertain age. The salary she offered Violet was small, the duties required of her were heavy. They included reading aloud for so many hours each day, combing the Skye terrier, and feeding the parrot.

In her anxiety to get away from the Shiftons Violet made light of these drawbacks, and accepted the situation. Mrs. Shifton made some protest on learning what she had done, and even pretended to be angry. But the pretence was so obvious that Violet felt more glad than ever at the idea of leaving her unkind, time-serving relatives for absolute strangers.

"What a change for you, Vi!" Julia observed, half compassionately, half scornfully, on the night previous to her cousin's departure. "You will never be able to adapt yourself to the re-

quirements of a seditious old woman, brought up as you have been."

"Yes, I shall," said Violet, firmly, her dark blue eyes full of hope and courage. "I mean to conquer circumstances, Julia. I will never be their slave."

"Well, I hope you will succeed," replied the other in a different tone. "You deserve to. I know you have not been happy while staying with us—that we have driven you away. The girls, take them all round, are hateful; you can't detect them more than I do, and my own temper is the reverse of angelic. I used to envy you, Violet, in your prosperous days, and now I am almost inclined to envy you your bright, brave, independent spirit that enables you to bear your reverses so well. I wish I resembled you a little more in some things. Will you write to me now and then to say how you are getting on?"

Violet promised to do so, and the two cousins parted on friendly terms with each other for the first time in their lives.

#### CHAPTER IV.

BUT for the satisfaction involved in earning her own living, Violet would have found it impossible to remain with Miss Massinger longer than the probationary month.

Unfortunately for the lonely, friendless girl, her new home was no improvement upon the old one. Miss Massinger turned out to be as undesirable a companion as any of the Shiftons.

Violet satisfied herself of this as she had been at Blackheath a week; and her heart sank within her as she contemplated the grey, hopeless future that stretched out before her. Yet she determined to bear with Miss Massinger's peculiarities as long as possible, rather than endure the humiliation of a return to her aunt's inhospitable roof.

Here, at least, she was giving service for money received, while at her aunt's she was at everybody's beck and call from morning to night, working hard, yet regarded as an expensive incumbrance. To have her position clearly defined was in itself an advantage.

Miss Massinger belonged to an extreme dissenting sect. She included amusements of all kinds in one sweeping condemnation. Novels were hateful to her, balls and theatres were unmentionable subjects, never alluded to save for the purpose of being villified. Popery was a stock bogey, kept in reserve for an occasional "shy" whenever Miss Massinger felt in the mood for it.

Her thin, narrow, unemotional nature felt no craving for healthy change and recreation. Consequently she ranked among those undesirable persons who—

"Compound for sins they have a mind to  
By damning those they're not inclined to."

Scandal, bad-temper, and extreme parsimony were not regarded by Miss Massinger as things to be avoided. At any rate, she indulged in them freely, both at home and abroad.

She had a weakness for meetings; indeed, she may have been said to live in a perpetual state of meeting. From welcoming back a missionary, who had escaped figuring as a spare dish on a barbaric sideboard, to discussing how and when the millennium might be expected to arrive, nothing in the shape of a meeting came amiss to her.

Violet was always expected to accompany her employer on these occasions. Oh! the long, dreary speeches, unenlivened by a single gleam of wit, she had to listen to week after week, in a spirit of mute rebellion.

Used to a wider and more enlightened mode of life, a genial, cultured atmosphere, Violet soon sickened of the narrow routine, the self-satisfied, all-condemning sectarianism that surrounded her.

For years after she had quitted Miss Massinger's house Violet never saw a chapel notice-board containing some allusion to Martin Luther and a tea-meeting without a shudder.

But the meetings and the long, dull evenings

spent in Miss Massinger's little drab drawing-room were not the worst evils she had to encounter.

Miss Massinger had a nephew, a clerk in the Home Office, who frequently paid her a visit. The maiden lady was well-off, and this fact may have accounted in a measure for Cecil Harrington's unfailing performance of the duty he owed to his elderly aunt.

He was at Rose Villa two or three times a week, seldom arriving empty-handed. Miss Massinger's domestic economy was very pronounced. Her nephew knew her weakness; and little presents of fruit and game, with other reasonable delicacies, saving her purse while gratifying her palate, kept her in high good humour, and increased his chance of finding the way to a prominent place in her will.

Like Sir Charles Anceley, Cecil Harrington was tall and fair; but there the likeness between the two men ended. A more rapid dandy than the Home Office clerk it would have been hard to find.

His grey eyes and regular, blond features were perfectly expressionless. His drooping moustache, with a suspicion of sandiness about it, concealed a sensual upper lip. His fellow-clerks called him "Dolly," and, somehow, the name suited him admirably.

The run upon Cecil Harrington's intellectual facilities at the Home Office could not have been great. Otherwise it must have met with the announcement of "No assets."

He could play billiards; he could stare with laughless insolence at a pretty woman; and his knowledge of slang—fashionable slang—was unlimited.

Violet, accustomed to associate with men of a very different stamp, regarded Cecil Harrington with ill-concealed scorn and aversion. His aunt, on the contrary, adored him. He had but one fault in her eyes—he always pleaded a previous engagement when she wanted him to go to a meeting.

By dint of keeping his worldly propensities carefully in the background when at Rose Villa, and simulating an interest in his aunt's pursuits, Cecil Harrington maintained his hold upon her favour, and won golden opinions for himself as a "serious" young man in an age of universal frivolity.

Above all things, Miss Massinger was anxious that her nephew should marry well. Like Tennyson's "Northern Farmer," she exhorted him never to marry for money, but to love where there was money; and, to do him justice, Cecil Harrington seemed quite willing to act upon such excellent advice.

Miss Massinger had even selected a desirable partner for him in the person of Hester Brown, a plain, homely, frank-spoken girl, the daughter of a rich tallow-chandler, when Violet arrived upon the scene, and threatened, unconsciously, to interfere with the satisfactory matrimonial programme the spinster had drawn up.

"Dolly," or Cecil, committed himself by falling in love with his aunt's companion, and pressing his unwelcome suit upon her whenever he got a chance.

Violet's rare beauty had fascinated him, and his armour of self-conceit was too thick for the light arrows of her scornful wit and marked indifference to pierce it.

"By Jove, though, you do behave badly to a fellow, Miss Stanwick!" he remarked one day in an injured tone, first taking care to ascertain that his aunt was not within hearing. "You won't let him make love to you when he is dying to do so."

"Certainly not," said Violet, going on with her work—an old woman's flannel petticoat—and trying hard not to laugh.

Cecil Harrington's attachment, although it annoyed her, had something sublimely ridiculous about it, which appealed to her keen sense of humour.

"You are afraid lest Aunt Margaret should hear of it, and give you the sack," said Cecil, elegantly, caressing his long moustache. "Well, she might. I know she expects me to do great things in the marrying line, and she'd be awfully savage if she thought I had thrown the handker-

chief to you. Never mind. We can hoodwink her for the present, and carry on our love-making without the dear old lady's knowledge. It would never do to offend her, you know. She's got no end of money in the funds, and I am her favourite nephew. But there's nothing to prevent us from forming a secret."

"Mr. Harrington," interrupted Violet, indignantly, "I am not afraid of anyone. If I refuse to accept or to permit your advances it is because I care nothing for you. I would far rather live and die an old maid than become your wife. After this plain speaking on my part I hope you will cease to annoy me with any proofs of affection, so-called."

"You don't mean that," said Cecil Harrington, incredulously.

That any woman could possibly fail to admire him had never crossed what he was pleased to call his mind.

"I do indeed. I wonder," scornfully, "that you are not afraid of my betraying your indiscreet liking for me to Miss Brown."

"She be hanged! I wouldn't marry a girl who reeks of tallow to please a dunsy aunt. Violet, you might say that you care just a little for me. I really am awfully fond of you. I lie awake at night trying to think how I could increase my income. If Aunt Margaret were eventually to cut up rough. We must try to avoid that if possible, though. Authorship occurred to me, and I went to a literary friend of mine to see if he could furnish me with a central idea; just to give me a start, you know."

"And what did he say?"

"Oh! the brute laughed; positively laughed, and said that a man who had to go round begging for a central idea had better shut up shop as an author, and try some other line."

"What sensible advice!"

"Oh! you think so, do you? You are the most heartless woman I ever met! But you won't make me believe that you care nothing for me. Women always say that at first, and come round afterwards. Violet, darling—"

"For pity's sake be quiet, sir! Miss Massinger is coming."

She bit her lips to avoid laughing at the swift, noiseless manner in which Cecil Harrington glided back to his chair, fearful of being discovered by his aunt in the act of making love to her companion.

When Miss Massinger entered the room he had disappeared from sight behind the columns of the *Daily Telegraph*, and Violet was stitching away industriously at the flannel petticoat.

In the midst of her sadness and discomfort Violet's thoughts often recurred to Langton Hall and the pleasant, luxurious existence that had once been hers.

Her father's death, too, had created a great blank—an aching sense of bereavement—that time did little to diminish. Whatever his faults might have been, Richard Stanwick, as a fond and indulgent parent, was deserving of the regret and loving, watchful memory cherished for him by his only child.

In order to know a little of what was transpiring in the fashionable world from which she was now excluded, Violet sometimes purchased a society journal, reading it in the seclusion of her own room to avoid disapproving remarks from Miss Massinger.

Her heart beat fast on one day coming across a paragraph relating to Sir Charles Anceley, her old lover. He was about to consummate a marriage with the only daughter and heiress of a rich city man.

The paper fell from Violet's hands when she had read this paragraph through several times, and a bitter smile curved her lovely mouth.

So the wealth for which the baronet had been so long angling was on the point of becoming his! Doubtless he had not thought proper to acquaint his fiancée of that previous engagement, long since cancelled. Did the city man's daughter imagine that her patrician lover was honestly fond of her apart from the bullion she possessed?

Perhaps, after all, Violet reflected, sadly, it was better to be poor and friendless, dependent upon her own exertions, than to be the wife of a man who had married her only for the sake of

her wealth. Her poverty had at least saved her from such a life-long misery, such a bitter awakening from a missummer night's dream of love and happiness that had existed only in her own imagination.

She no longer cared for Sir Charles. His conduct had shattered her love for him at one blow. Yet, connected as he was with that far-off beautiful past upon which her thoughts often rested so regretfully, she could not wholly disengage him from it, and the roseate light that hovered around it.

Her position as Miss Massinger's companion was fast becoming unbearable. Cecil Harrington redoubled his persecutions, and Violet became fearful, lest Miss Massinger should give her credit for encouraging him when once the love-making came under her notice.

A dogged, obstinate, pertinacity distinguished Cecil Harrington's passion for his aunt's beautiful companion. Violet's unvarying coldness, her speeches, frank to the verge of facetiousity, failed to check or diminish it. Once discovered, Violet knew it would cost her her situation.

The constant strain upon her nerves—the effort to keep her hated suitor at bay—was beginning to make her look worn and harassed.

One day, while Miss Massinger was downstairs superintending the making of jam, Cecil Harrington urged upon Violet the expediency of a secret marriage.

"She can't go on living for ever, you know," he explained, in touching allusion to his absent relative, "and we must condense her till then to suit our own purposes, Violet. It won't be such a difficult matter to treat each other coolly, and behave as if we cared nothing for each other when once we are man and wife, will it? I shall have made sure of you then without offending Aunt Margaret. Violet, you must consent. I shall be miserable for life if you don't."

"You are guilty of unmanly conduct in thus annoying a defenceless woman and pestering her with your unwelcome proposals," flashed Violet, turning at last upon her tormentor. "If you persist in doing so I shall be compelled to leave Rose Villa, and earn my living elsewhere. I cannot, and will not, marry you. No brave, honourable man would be guilty of proposing a secret marriage to the woman he loved. In your case my answer would be the same either way, so it makes little difference. Why expose yourself to the humiliation of repeated refusals from one who cares less than nothing for you?"

"But, Violet, hear me," pleaded Cecil, his sleepy, grey eyes wide awake for once, and expressive of something akin to pathos. "I'm awfully hard hit, and—"

Violet vanished through one of the two doors leading into the drawing-room without perceiving that Miss Massinger was using her ears freely as the other.

Half an hour later, after dismissing her nephew, Miss Massinger sent for Violet. One glance at the white, rigid face of her employer assured the girl that she knew all.

"Miss Stanwick, I am sorry to say that our connection must come to an end at once," she began, without any unnecessary preamble. "I overheard my nephew in the act of making you an offer of marriage this morning. His liking for you has not escaped my notice. It only needed this to confirm my suspicions. I must request you to leave my house to-day."

"Certainly, since you wish it," said Violet, with quiet hauteur, "although it is a cruel and unjust proceeding. Since you overheard Mr. Harrington's proposal, you are also aware of my refusal of it!"

"You did refuse him, I admit," said Miss Massinger, reluctantly. "Some credit is due to you for remembering the discrepancies in your respective positions and refusing to marry my nephew. At the same time—"

"You ascribe a wrong motive to me in this matter," interrupted Violet, firmly. "No thought of your nephew's social superiority prevented me from accepting him. Indeed, I have never recognised such a distinction between us as the one you allude to. The position I formerly occupied in society was a far higher one



than Mr. Harrington can ever hope to aspire to. Had I liked him I might have accepted his offer of marriage. I refused him simply because his suit was obnoxious to me in the extreme, and I had not the least wish to become his wife."

"This is plain-speaking, Miss Stanwick," said the spinster, divided between thankfulness at her dear boy's narrow escape, and indignation that any woman could fall to find him irresistible.

"I intend it to be. I wish to correct your erroneous idea, Miss Massinger. I cannot understand why you should send me from your house with less notice than a maid-of-all-work might expect, after such a declaration."

"Cecil is very obstinate," explained Miss Massinger. "If he has set his heart on marrying you he won't take no for an answer. He will persevere till he has succeeded in winning your consent. To remove this danger you must go. I will pay you a quarter's salary in lieu of notice, and you will be so kind as not to leave your new address with me. Then I can say truthfully that I am not aware of your destination. Oh, yes, you can apply to me for any references you may need in obtaining another situation. I am sorry to lose you, but there is no alternative. I mean to save Cecil—little as he cares for me—from an undesirable marriage. I could not do that if you remained."

"Your fears are groundless. I dislike your nephew too much ever to marry him!" said Violet, disdainfully, as she left the room, and went upstairs to commence her packing.

Her head ached fearfully; a sense of coming illness weighed her down. She knew not where to go, for the Shifttons were all in Germany, and their house was closed for the time being. Lonely, suffering, ill-treated, Violet hid her anguished face in her hands, and prayed vainly for death to come and release her.

## CHAPTER V.

WITH an effort Violet subdued her outburst of passionate despair, and set about the task of packing.

Since her aunt was absent from town she must find a suitable lodging until she succeeded in meeting with another situation.

She had her twenty pounds still intact, and a quarter's salary to receive in addition. But for that oppressive feeling of illness which rendered all exertion painful to her, Violet would have experienced less regret at the idea of leaving her uncongenial employment.

In the corner of one of her trunks was a little bundle of papers, tied up with blue ribbon. Mr. Perry had brought these papers to her after Richard Stanwick's death, with a compassionate smile upon his grave face.

"Against my wishes your father bought up ten thousand pounds worth of shares in the Great Jametsee Railroad Company some time ago, Miss Stanwick," he explained. "As I anticipated, the scheme has proved a total failure. The natives pull up the rails as fast as they are laid down, and murder the navvies engaged in constructing the railroad. Owing to their belligerent attitude and other unfavourable combinations, the idea of making a railroad into the interior has practically been abandoned. The shares, I am sorry to say, are worth nothing. I cannot dispose of them, since it is so unlikely that Jametsee will ever go up again in value. Do you care to keep them by you on the chance of their doing so? Oh, no, the creditors don't want them—they are really so much waste-paper. A pity, a sad pity, that money should have been spent to so little advantage."

"I may as well keep them," Violet had replied, sadly, taking the unlucky shares from the lawyer. "Who knows! They may bring me in a little money some day. At any rate, I will keep them for poor papa's sake. I do not blame him, Mr. Perry; I am only sorry for him that he should have been so unfortunate in all his investments."

So the Jametsees were stowed away in Violet's trunk, mute reminders whenever she

looked at them of the mania for speculation that had been her father's ruin.

Her packing finished, she went out in search of a lodging.

There were plenty of cards in the different windows. Yet when Violet made inquiries as to the rent and number of the apartments to be let, they seldom corresponded with her requirements.

One landlady would not let less than three bedrooms with the small tawdry sitting-room. Another asked a price that Violet knew she could not pay, while a third objected to letting her rooms to a "single young lady," accompanying the remark with a sneer that made the girl's face flush hotly, she hardly knew why.

Through one small, "genteel" street after another she paced wearily, making frequent and useless inquiries wherever she saw a "To let" card in the window. Had ever a sitting-room and bedroom been so difficult to obtain before?

And the pain in her head was fast growing worse. What could it mean? Violet wondered, in a dull, stupefied way. Was she about to be ill? If so, Heaven help her!—alone among strangers. Perhaps the illness would bring death in its train! In that case it would not be altogether unwelcome.

A pleasant little house with green shutters, standing back in a garden, presently attracted her attention. There was a "To let" card in the first-floor window. Violet went up the garden-path, and knocked timidly. Her previous failures had discouraged her.

The door was opened by a gentle-faced, elderly woman dressed in Quaker-grey. In answer to Violet's inquiry she stated that she had two rooms to let, for which she asked only a moderate rental.

On inspection they proved to be clean and comfortable. The sitting-room especially was furnished with some regard for taste and elegance. No fearful-coloured prints or china monstrosities adorned either the walls or the mantelpiece. Pictures, carpet, ornaments, all bespoke refined choice, and careful selection. A cottage piano stood in one corner of the little apartment, and a well-filled bookcase ran along one wall, surmounted by some pieces of old blue Oriental ware.

Violet gladly decided to take the rooms, explaining her position as a companion out of employment to Mrs. Murray, the landlady, and offering a money deposit, and a reference to Miss Massinger, should either or both be necessary.

Mrs. Murray, however, was hardly as cautious as the generality of landladies. Violet's face and manner had taken her fancy. She felt quite sure that her new lodger was a lady, and she expressed herself willing to accept Violet upon her own recognisances.

Thankful to have secured a temporary resting-place Violet returned to Rose Villa to receive her salary, and remove her personal belongings.

Miss Massinger, grim as ever, handed over the quarter's money in allience, together with a superfluous bank-note for ten-pounds. Even her tough conscience pricked her a little on beholding the white, weary face of the girl she was thus sending adrift at a moment's notice. She intended the bank-note as some amends for her harsh conduct.

But Violet, after signing a receipt for the quarter's salary, handed the bank-note back to Miss Massinger with a look of inexpressible scorn.

"I will take what is due to me, and nothing more," she said, quietly. "Money cannot atone for conduct like yours, Miss Massinger—conduct devoid of all justice and womanly pity. On that account I refuse to accept it."

"As you please," retorted the other. "Your reflections upon my action in this matter trouble me very little, since I have the approval of my conscience. I am doing a good work in saving my nephew from an unsuitable marriage. To accomplish this I am compelled to send you away. If you fail to perceive the necessity that is not my fault. Take or leave the money as you will; but remember, Miss Stanwick, that pride must have a fall, and you are full of pride."

"Only towards those who treat me with cruel

injustice," said Violet, firmly, and even Miss Massinger quailed before the indignant glance of those dark blue eyes. "Perhaps in the days to come your behaviour towards a friendless woman may rise up in judgment against you, and nullify some of the self-righteous deeds with which you love to keep a debtor-and-creditor account with the Heaven which is so often upon your lips, and so seldom in your heart!"

Ere the astonished lady could utter any reply to this bold speech Violet had left the room.

A fly was waiting at the door; the luggage was soon piled on the top of it, and Violet Stanwick breathed more freely on being driven away from the inhospitable precincts of Rose Villa.

It was getting dusk when she arrived at her new lodgings. Mrs. Murray had lighted a fire in the sitting-room, and her little maid, a queer, sharp-featured girl with sandy hair and a freckled face, came in presently with the tea-tray.

It was all very bright and cosy, but Violet felt too ill and unhappy to enjoy it. She drank some tea; her throat, parched and dry, would not admit of her taking any food, and then, getting out her desk, she tried to write a letter to her aunt.

Certain now that she was on the verge of an illness, perhaps a long and dangerous one, she was feverishly anxious to acquaint the only relative upon whom she had a claim with her painful position, and the circumstances that had led up to it, while the power of doing so was still hers.

But her trembling fingers refused to hold the pen. Unintelligible sentences appeared upon the paper, faintly traced, as if by a palsied hand.

Violet sat there staring blankly at her own changed handwriting, striving vainly to collect her thoughts.

A nervous dread of being alone took possession of her. Wild fancies flitted through her brain, weird faces seemed to gaze at her from the shadowy corners of the room—mocking elfin laughter ran in her startled ears. Her father, Sir Charles, Miss Massinger, and Cecil Harrington—a ghostly quartet—joined hands and formed a ring round her, then vanished in grey smoke-wreaths up the chimney as noiselessly as they came. How quiet the room was! Oh! for life, sound, motion of some kind, to save her from going mad!

When Meg, the little maid, came to remove the tea-tray, something in Violet's appearance must have struck her as being unusual. From what she said Mrs. Murray was induced to form a pretext for entering her lodger's sitting-room.

She found Violet still sitting in front of her desk, with heavy downcast eyes, regarding the unfinished letter.

"Miss Stanwick, I fear you are ill!" she said, gently, placing her hand on the girl's shoulder.

Violet looked up helplessly.

"Yes, I am very ill," she replied, a moan of pain in her voice. "I cannot imagine what is the matter with me. I have never felt like this before. I see such strange things as I sit here, and my head is on fire. Oh! what shall I do!"

"Have you any friends in London?" asked Mrs. Murray.

"My aunt lives there, but she is in Germany at the present time, and her house is closed. I

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was trying to write to her when you came in, only the words swam before my eyes and made me giddy. I must try to finish the letter to-night. I may be worse to-morrow!"

"Suppose you lie down for a little while, and let me finish the letter for you!" suggested Mrs. Murray, kindly. "You are not capable of writing to-night."

"If I am very ill you had better send me to the hospital," said Violet, feebly. "They will not refuse to take me in there, and I shall be out of everyone's way."

"My dear child, don't speak so bitterly," remonstrated the elder woman. "You may not be so ill as you imagine, and you are too young to give way to despair. Sit down now on the sofa, and I will bathe your forehead with eau de Cologne."

Under this soothing process Violet fell into an uneasy, convulsive sleep. When she awoke, with a sensation of twenty sledge-hammers all going at once in her head, a man's voice, deep, grave and musical, pierced through the haze that enveloped all her faculties.

"She is very ill. I believe she is in for a sharp attack of brain fever. Send Meg for the doctor, Aunt Mary. If the room is ready I will carry her upstairs."

Violet felt herself gently lifted in a pair of strong arms. A delicious sense of rest and protection overwhelmed her, followed by the dull blank of perfect unconsciousness.

(To be concluded in our next)

## TOM'S WIFE AND CHILD.

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WHEN I rose on the morning of my twentieth birthday and nodded merrily to my own reflection in the glass, the bright young face that laughed back at me was that of a handsome, happy, and very fortunate girl.

"Good morning, Miss Lydia Searle," I said. "And if all goes well with us, you won't be Miss Lydia Searle at all this time next year, but Mrs. Harry Hatton instead."

It wanted but three weeks of my wedding-day. I was as happy as I was busy just then, for I loved the man whose bride I was so soon to become with all a young girl's warm, untried affection.

"Better than anyone in the world but Tom," I thought. "And surely nobody ever could or ought to be dearer to me than Tom."

Tom was my twin brother. The usual strong affection existing between twins was exceptionally powerful in our case—from circumstances.

One of us was born strong and robust, and the other frail and small. Notwithstanding my sex, I was the favoured one by nature, while Tom was the weakly twin.

That was the first of his misfortunes which naturally gave him a claim on me, and at the same time attached him to me and made him cling to me as a heartier, manlier boy would not have done. The second misfortune was that he resembled our father.

Poor fellow! As if he could help that! And yet Uncle Elliot resented it in him just as if he had been to blame for it. "Not a farthing of my money shall go to this second Tom Searle," he used to say.

And he kept his word. He had adopted us at poor mother's death. Our father had died years before.

He gave us both a good education, and got Tom a position in a bank; but when he died—just a year before that twentieth birthday of mine—I was his sole heiress.

It grieved me terribly. I loved Tom better far than myself, and would have shared anything with him; but he was proud, poor dear, and wouldn't hear of such a thing.

So the best thing I could do was to spend as much money upon him as possible, and lend him all he wanted to use. He had no objection to that, because as he would say,—

"Some of these days, when I'm partner in the bank, I'll pay it all back again, Lyddy."

And, of course, it was quite probable that some day he would be partner, since I was about to be married to the banker's only son and heir.

I was puzzled sometimes to know what Tom did with so much money. He had "speculations on hand," he told me. I thought that perhaps he was rather extravagant, too—perhaps somewhat inclined to be wild.

"He is so young and so handsome," I thought.

I was always making excuses for him to myself; but, of course, common sense taught me that if he would be steadier, and attend to business better, his chances of promotion at the bank would be improved.

As I thought of him on that birthday morning—of course it was his birthday, too—the face in the glass ceased to smile, and a new anxiety crept into my thoughts.

Tom had acted very strangely. I had lain awake a long time thinking of it last night, and a vague uneasiness smote me as I remembered it now. What could have ailed him?

He had come in, at about ten o'clock, to the little parlour where Harry and I were sitting together, and had remained with us, restless, agitated, nervous, and showing so plainly that he wished to see me alone that presently Harry, half-versed, half-amused, took the hint and left us.

And then he asked me for money. No trifling sum either. He implored me, almost wildly, to "give him three hundred, then and there, for Heaven's sake!"

He almost took my breath away. I had no such sum of money in the house, of course, nor could I get it on short notice. My fortune consisted of real estate, from which I derived a moderate income, and a few hundreds in ready money, which, what with Tom's extravagance and my own preparation for my marriage, were nearly gone.

Quite aghast at his agitation, as well as at his request, I explained to him the utter impossibility of compliance. He said not a word, but dropped into a seat, and sat looking at me as if stupefied.

Every vestige of colour had gone from his fair, handsome face, and the delicate, clear-cut features looked haggard and careworn. A pang shot through my heart as I saw his distress. I ceased to care or wonder what the money was wanted for. I knelt down beside him.

"I'll get it for you to-morrow," I said, "if I have to mortgage my property. Don't despair; only wait till to-morrow, dear."

As my hand touched his, he started, and looked down at me. He was never very strong or brave—never fit to battle with trouble. It seemed to have crushed him now; tears fell from his eyes upon my face.

"Never mind," he moaned. "Poor Lyddy! Poor girl!" he patted my hand fondly. "I know you'd give it to me if you could. Ah, I've been a bad brother to you, dear. Say you forgive me to-night."

And, of course, I said so—said so weeping. His manner distressed me so; but I didn't know what there was to forgive.

I was wiser before that birthday was half over, though the knowledge seemed the greatest calamity of my life.

"Something had gone wrong at the bank," Harry told me. He broke the bitter news to me as gently as he could, and with a grave, pale face. "Three hundred pounds, which had been intrusted to Tom to deliver somewhere several weeks ago, had not been accounted for; and—there were errors, too, to his accounts—"

I heard no more. Insensibility smothered me for a while from the agony of Tom's ruin and my own disgrace.

For must not his sister share his dishonour? I felt that bitterly at first—I who had been so proud of him. But, by-and-bye, indignation, shame, anger, all gave place to love and love's anxiety. Tom was missing.

What mattered it to me that he had sinned! He was still my brother, and I loved him. My thoughts flew back to his despair that night—his fears, his self-reproach, his prayer for my forgiveness. I remembered how weak he was,

how easily led, and who could tell how greatly tempted; and from my soul I forgave him.

I had not waited for that, however, before taking steps to shield him from the consequences of his crime.

Mr. Hatton was merciful. He had no wish to bring public disgrace upon the family of his old friend—upon the girl whom his own son was engaged to marry. I was permitted to make up the deficit in the bank's accounts. In order to do so, and for another reason, I instructed my lawyer to dispose of my property. And that other reason was a letter from Tom, received just one week from his departure.

A pitiful letter—the outcry of a penitent and almost broken heart. He had not appropriated the money, thank Heaven! but he had been out and drinking, with the money in his possession, and had been robbed of it.

Oh, how grateful I was! Every other misfortune in the world might be borne with patience now, since Tom was not dishonest.

He confessed to me a thousand indiscretions, follies, sins; told me of many and serious debts that he had left behind him. Most startling of all, he told me he was married, and implored me to seek out and protect his wife and child.

Tom's wife and child! Who was she? After the first surprise was over, I found myself longing to see my new sister and the little one.

I went to the address Tom had sent me; went with a carriage, prepared to bring my new relations home. Disappointment met me. Mrs. Searle and her child had gone.

"They were behind with their rent," said the landlady, "and the husband went away, so I couldn't keep her. She left to-day."

I returned home discouraged. I didn't want to see or speak to anyone just then, so it was peculiarly annoying to find that a young woman, whom I had employed to do sewing more than a year ago, had called and was waiting to see me.

I went down to her. She rose to meet me as I entered the parlour. Little Eva Robinson! I remembered the girl well—a pretty, gentle, timid creature.

I started when I saw that she had an infant in her arms.

"Why, what's this!" I cried.

"My baby," she said, timidly. "I'm married since I saw you last, miss."

I sat down, and bade her do the same, and then asked her what I could do to serve her.

For all answer she burst into a passion of tears, and, rising suddenly, came and laid the infant in my lap.

"Have mercy on me!" she cried, falling on her knees. "This is your brother's child and mine, and I—I am his wife!"

I was a proud girl, and this blow was a heavy one. My brother, so handsome, such a favourite, so unfit to fight for wife and child! He might have married so advantageously, I thought, and here I was called upon to welcome as a sister my own sewing-girl!

But I did. I may have shrunk from her for an instant, perhaps, in the first surprise; but next minute the thought of that other disgrace, which Tom had not brought on himself and me, returned to me, and in my gratitude at escaping that I could not murmur.

She was a dear little thing, too, after all; and the baby charming. Ah! I had reason to be thankful for the comfort of their presence soon. For the very next day, meeting an acquaintance in the street, she said,—

"And so I hear that your marriage is postponed, dear!"

My heart sunk down like lead.

"Who informed you?" I asked quietly.

"Your intended bridegroom, Mr. Harry Hatton, himself. Is it not true?"

"Perfectly true," I answered.

"And postponed until when?"

"Indefinitely."

I wrote the same day to Harry,—

"You desire your freedom; take it. You will never be called upon to fulfil your engagement with me."

And he took me at my word.

He called, certainly, and made a pretence of explanation and regret. The almost entire loss



of my fortune had influenced his father, not himself; but my brother's conduct—  
I stopped him there.

"Tom was innocent," I said; "and what he lost I had restored. You have acknowledged that there was nothing wrong in his accounts. You need seek no excuse in his conduct, sir."  
He lost his temper.

"Do you excuse his destruction of an innocent girl, and abandonment of her and her child?" he said.

With one quick movement I threw open the folding-doors, and showed him Eva and her son.

"Allow me to introduce you to my brother's wife and child, whom he left in my protection."

But his words had made me uneasy. That evening, seated with the baby on my lap, I asked Eva where she had married.

"Alas!" she cried, "if I only knew. Tom took me to church in a carriage. It was in this very city, but I don't know where. It was because I had no certificate of my marriage that I dared not go to my brother—my dear, noble brother—who has struggled so hard, and made himself, unaided, an honourable position and a name. I know that a cruel slander concerning me has been carried to him that must almost have broken his heart."

I took her hands away from her face and kissed her.

"We'll find the church," I said. "There must be no slander about my dear brother's wife."

And I did find it after a few days' search. Then I got John Robinson's address—he was a lawyer, I found—and requested him to call on me.

He came, a wonderfully grave, handsome man, with something singularly manly and impressive about him. In my heart I thought:

"No wonder Eva wept at thought of his displeasure. He is worth pleasing, surely."

I took him to the parlour.

"I wish to reconcile you to your sister," I said. "She is my brother's wife."

Then I left them together. After an hour or more, Eva came for me.

"John wants to say 'good-bye' before he goes," said she.

He took my hand in his and looked into my eyes.

"You are a good woman," he said, earnestly. "May Heaven bless you and make you as truly happy as you have to-day made me!"

There was something in his mere look and tone—strength, a truth, a thorough reliability—that gave one comfort somehow. I found myself thinking:

"If it had been my fate to love such a man as that I should be nearer happiness than I am to-day."

But I kept my thoughts to myself. Only from that hour I was sensible that I regretted my lost hopes and happiness for their own sake, far more than I mourned for the false lover on whom they had been founded.

One week later all my property was sold. I had paid off Tom's debts; and, accompanied by his wife and child, joined him in a country home.

There we began life anew. I had a small income still, and Tom obtained a lucrative position. The lesson of the past was not lost upon him. The sacrifice I made was not in vain. Dear Tom was a changed man—changed for the better. Whatever I had lost had been his gain.

And what had I lost? The money I counted less than nothing; and Harry Hatton's love was not worth a regret. What was it, then? I sighed for the trust betrayed—the glamour and illusion gone from life so early.

"Oh! to be well and truly loved!" I thought. And then—my thoughts never went back to Harry.

Another filled them. Strange impression that man had made upon me; seen only once; never to be forgotten. I thought of him constantly; and heard from him through Eva, now and then.

"What is your brother's wife like, Eva?" I asked her once, just to try her.

"He has none," she answered. "I know what I should wish her to be like, though." And her

eyes dwelt on me in a way that made my tell-tale colour rise.

A few days afterwards she came to me laughing.

"I told John of your question, and only hear what he says." She read aloud:—

"Tell Lydia my wife (that is to be, I hope) resides in your town. I hope to visit you before very long, and introduce her to you."

And he did. With the merry Christmas season John came. I think that was the very happiest season of my life. Of course, you guess it is all ended now. I smile now, looking back and remembering that I fancied once I loved another than John. That was a dream, but this reality. All my sacrifices have been well repaid, and all my loss was gain; I realise that, every time I hear pretty Eva speak of me—as I first spoke of her and the baby—as "Tom's wife and child."

[THE END]

## DOLLY'S LEGACY.

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### CHAPTER XIII.

WE left Lady Madeleine Charteris just aroused to a knowledge of her own secret; engaged to her cousin, Viscount Devereux, her whole heart was Mr. Clifford's. In the first bloom of her youth she had yet learned to love a man more than twenty years her senior.

"He will never know," thought Madeleine, to herself. "He thinks of me as a child, and I—I love him as my own life. If only I could break off this engagement and stay with papa! I do not think it would hurt me so much; at least, I should see him sometimes, and it wouldn't be wrong to go on loving him, but to marry Jack—"

Hedress though she was Madeleine understood very little the value of money; only through her Aunt Matilda's confidence she had learned that money was very necessary to Jack, and that he would possess only a scanty fortune of his own compared to his rank. Perhaps Madeleine thought of that when she went to her father, and begged him to leave his whole property to Lord Devereux, to make Jack his heir instead of herself, and to free her from the engagement whose bonds had been formed when she was a little child.

Poor Lord Charteris! He groaned aloud when he listened to his child's story. He was not particularly fond of Jack, but he dreaded Madeleine falling a prey to a fortune-hunter, and this engagement, begun when she was a child in the school-room, seemed to him a suitable one; besides, the Earl was very tenacious of the honour of his house. The Charteris's had all been noted for their truth; he could not bear that his daughter, his only child, should be false to her troth.

Madeleine looked at him with trembling lips and tearful eyes.

"Jack does not love me," she said, simply; "but for my fortune I think he would be glad for the engagement to be broken off. Oh! papa, do let him take it, and give me back my freedom."

The Earl stroked her bowed head carelessly. He was too fond of his daughter to willingly see her suffer, and yet—

"Have you thought of it well, child?" he asked, presently. "When did you begin to change?"

"I have thought of it incessantly. I don't think I ever loved Jack, only before you came home I was so unhappy with Aunt Matilda, and Jack used to promise me I should do just as I liked when we were married. I think it was that tempted me, papa."

The Earl of Charteris confided his trouble to his friend that very evening. Paul Clifford had come to dinner, and as the two sat over their wine he remarked his host's troubled expression, and soon induced him to pour out his worries.

"You see," said Lord Charteris, sadly, "I

can't force my little girl to marry a man she does not care for, and yet I don't like the thought of her being branded as one light of faith."

"Lord Charteris, have you any idea of Devereux's real character?" asked Paul.

"Oh, he's a good fellow enough; not very clever, perhaps, but thoroughly good-hearted, and perfectly devoted to Madeleine."

Paul smiled.

"I suppose you trust me! You have known me for many years, and we have been staunch friends."

"I'd trust you with my life, Paul."

"Then I will tell you what has been on my lips for weeks. If Lady Madeleine wishes to withdraw from her engagement I can no longer have any reason for keeping silent. I feared before to be thought intrusive or impertinent."

"Go on," said the Earl, a little taken aback by his manner, "you know I like plain speaking."

"Lord Devereux is utterly unworthy of your daughter. He is a man of dissolute habits and immoral character."

The Earl stared.

"Why, he's always begging for an early marriage; says he longs to have a home and settle down!"

"It is well-known in London that his creditors will not wait much longer. He has given many of them a bond promising payment within a month of his marriage with Lady Madeleine. I know his liabilities are over thirty thousand pounds. He counts on paying them with your daughter's marriage portion."

"He never will! I'd rather the child was an old maid. I'm very much obliged to you, Clifford."

"I own I have a personal cause to think lightly of Lord Devereux's honour," said Paul, gravely. "For weeks I have been seeking a young girl in whom I was much interested. All efforts of mine have failed to trace her, and the last time she was seen Lord Devereux was in her company."

"And you think—"

"I don't know what to think. The girl was pure and true, I would stake my life on it. I had already rescued her once from the Viscount's persecution. I only know she has disappeared. I have spent time and labour, aye, and money, too, in the search, but I have never discovered the slightest clue."

Lord Charteris wrung his friend's hand.

"You have solved my difficulties. I shall break off the engagement at once on my own authority. I shall take the whole onus of the matter upon my own shoulders. If Devereux's character be known few will wonder that I shrink from entrusting him with the happiness of my only child."

"No one will wonder. I think on all sides there has been surprise that you ever consented to the engagement."

"I believed in the Devereux family. You know that the Countess and my poor wife were sisters. Well, you have saved my daughter from life-long misery, and I thank you from my heart. I wish I could do anything to aid your search, if only to prove my gratitude."

The younger man sighed. It was evident the matter lay very near his heart.

"Tell me everything," urged the Earl. "I have proved myself very blind in my own affairs. But, who knows, I may be better in yours."

At least it was a relief to pour out his difficulty; at least it was something to have a sympathising listener. Paul Clifford told all he knew of Dolly, from the moment of his meeting her in Regent-street to the story of her singing for alms on New Year's night.

"And you say she reminds you of a friend?" asked the Earl, who had listened with great interest.

Paul looked at him eagerly.

"You have heard the story of the late Countess of Desmond! Connected as you are with the present master of Field Royal, you must have heard of the will which made him practically a poor man."

The Earl stared.

"I understand. You believe that this

"Dolly" is, in very truth the late Lord's daughter and your ward!"

"I believe it from my soul."

"Then why on earth did you lose sight of her?"

Paul groaned. It was a question he had asked himself again and again.

"I shall never cease to reproach myself to my dying day. If only I had gone in with her and seen the woman she called mother I must have solved my doubts one way or the other, and I might have saved that innocent girl untold pain."

"Why didn't you?"

Paul flushed like a boy.

"You have probably heard I loved the Countess Viola; her husband chose to be jealous of me. He need not, since he possessed her whole heart. Years after he acknowledged the folly of his suspicions."

"But your interest in this poor lady was only another reason for your investigating the matter."

Again the strange flush.

"I asked the child Dolly about her mother, and from her answer I knew the woman she spoke of could not be Viola. Then I decided the resemblance must be merely a coincidence, and that it was too late to intrude upon a stranger."

"I can't make you out. If you were certain that Mrs. Smith was not Lady Desmond, what has changed your opinion?"

"I still believe Mrs. Smith was not the Countess Viola, but I have come to the conclusion Dolly was not her daughter. The old, faithful confidential servant of the Countess disappeared within a month of the loss, and has never been heard of since. My theory is that Susan Baines joined her ill-fated mistress, and brought up the infant, whose life cost its mother's as her own child. Everything points to this; their hurried removal (caused, as I suppose, by the girl's mention of Lord Devereux), the fact alleged by all who knew them that there was no likeness between the two—everything to my mind, points out that I have at last solved the mystery."

Lord Charteris took a turn or two up and down the room. At last he said, slowly,—

"I believe you are right."

"And I know I am."

"No wonder you have sought her far and wide; but, Paul, don't be discouraged, she must be found."

Paul Clifford looked in despair.

"I don't see how. I have communicated with Lord Devereux again and again; I saw him only this morning. He was then just starting for Field Royal, and he swore on his word of honour that he had never seen the girl since he parted from her in Kensington on New Year's night. He added it was not his fault, for he had sought her far and wide. His love can bring a woman little happiness, but I believe such love as he can feel he has poured out upon Dolly."

"Well, Madeleine shall be free from him. Do you think he noticed Miss Smith's resemblance to his aunt?"

"I am sure he did not. Remember, the Countess was only at Field Royal a very few months and the little Devereuxs were all away!"

"Ah! I was wondering whether his pursuit of Dolly had an object, whether he had discovered her identity, and wished to secure his inheritance by marrying the true heiress."

"I should say not. I believe Lady Desmond is the only member of the family who believes in the existence of a nearer heir."

"Well," returned the Earl, decidedly, "Miss Smith must be found."

The old nobleman was a little bit of an autocrat. He had ruled over his soldiers despotically, and he rather expected to rule over other people and fate and circumstances in the same fashion.

But for the real anxiety at his heart Mr. Clifford could have laughed at the simplicity with which Lord Charteris repeated "she must be found," as though he expected her to appear at once in obedience to his orders.

"But how! I tell you for more than two months I have been seeking her. I have employed every means in my power and failed."

"Adventure."

Paul shook his head.

"And have the Devereux family down on me directly. No, Lord Charteris, until Dolly is actually found your sister-in-law must have no hint of her existence; it would be fatal."

"I suppose you are right. Matilda would never rest until she found her, and it might go hardly with the child. I have a great esteem for Matilda, but I don't think she would spare anything that came between her children and their advantages."

"I can't see any light in it."

A ray of inspiration came to the Earl.

"Let's tell Madeleine."

"How could she help us?"

"Women have wonderful heads," returned the Earl, "and they find out things almost by magic. I'm sure my little girl could help us."

"Her sympathies would naturally be with her aunt and cousin."

"I don't think so."

"And women always talk."

"Not my little girl; besides, we've only got to tell her to keep it a secret."

I don't know how much longer the two would have argued the matter, but the door opened suddenly, and Madeleine appeared.

Paul Clifford had pleaded an engagement that would take him away directly after dinner. He had even said "good-bye" to Madeleine before she left the dining-room; therefore when two hours passed and the Earl never came into coffee his daughter not unnaturally supposed he had fallen asleep over his chair.

"You wicked old man!" she said, fondly resting one hand upon his shoulder. "Do you know I have been waiting coffee for ages and ages!"

"It is my fault, Lady Madeleine," said Clifford, coming forward. "I have been consulting the Earl on a little matter of business."

Madeleine blushed.

"I thought papa was alone," she said, a little pointedly, "or I should not have intruded."

"Nonsense, child," rejoined her father, "you know you could never be unwelcome. Sit down in that armchair, and draw it close to the fire. There, now listen attentively while Clifford tells you a story, and do your best to help him. I was just wishing for you when you came."

The girl had great tact; perhaps love sharpened it. She felt instinctively her presence was unwelcome to Mr. Clifford.

"You forget, papa," she said, gently, "it is not your secret. Perhaps Mr. Clifford would rather I should not hear it."

Paul interrupted her.

"I should like to tell it you, Lady Madeleine, only I must first bind you over to secrecy, and then—"

"And then?" she repeated, wistfully.

"I fear I may seem to speak harshly of some who are near and dear to you—your late fiancé, for example."

The bare sound of the adjective was a relief to her.

"I do not think we shall quarrel about that," she said, gently. "You have known my relations so many years you would not speak unkindly of them without cause. Now I am quite ready to listen; but tell me first whom does your story concern?"

"A young lady," answered the Earl.

"A pretty, lonely child," corrected Mr. Clifford, and then he told the story to Madeleine just as he had already told it to her father. At first she sat in perfect silence; then as the narrative went on the colour in her cheeks deepened, and she clasped her hands in eager interest.

"I have seen her," she said, slowly; "she sang outside this very house on New Year's night. I remember it so well. I thought I had never seen anyone half so beautiful."

"You have seen her?" breathed Paul. "Then you will know how unfit she is to be wandering alone in this great London."

"She is not in London."

Both the men started; Madeleine spoke with such an air of firm conviction, it was more as though she were announcing a fact no one could dispute than giving utterance to a mere opinion of her own.

"Not in London? What makes you say so?" Madeleine blushed.

"I could not help it; I pitied her as, she was so pretty; I wanted so much to see her again. For weeks I used to sit at the drawing-room window listening for her, but she never came again."

"That proves nothing."

"I think it does. That first night I threw her half-a-sovereign. If she were in distress, don't you think she would have come down this road again?"

"And what is your opinion, Lady Madeleine?"

"I think her mother is dead."

"That might be, but then her position would be much worse."

"I think her mother is dead," repeated Madeleine, "and she has taken a situation in the country. You say you have sought for her everywhere in vain. Well, all the time she may be living a peaceful life in some little village. You say she told you her great wish was to live in the country; do you think she would bear to stay in London after her mother died?"

Paul was bewildered by her quick reasoning.

"I think you are right."

"And I am sure of it. Depend upon it her mother died. I daresay some good people came to see her, and promised to befriend the girl; then when all was over they got her a situation."

"Well, she won't need to work now," said the Earl, cheerfully. "She must come to us, and we'll make her happy till you can get her own home ready for her, Clifford," continued the old nobleman, settling matters as calmly as though Dolly and her luggage were only in the next street waiting to be fetched in his brougham.

Madeleine grew very pale. Clifford bent towards her with an eager face.

"Would you really do that? Would you agree to your father's plan, and receive the poor child until all the business formalities had been gone through?"

Madeleine imagined he meant to marry her himself, that his was the home to be got ready for her, marriage settlements and a trousseau, the "business formalities" to be gone through. It would be cruellest pain to her to live under the same roof as Paul's fiancée, but she never hesitated.

"I would do my best to make her happy."

"It's very generous of you, child," said Paul, hoarsely. "Don't you know that in all probability this little wail will be mistress of the home and wearer of the title you have so long expected to possess yourself?"

Madeleine blushed furiously. Could Mr. Clifford be going mad; surely not, and yet how else, even if he had guessed her secret affection for himself, could he dare to allude to it?

"I do not understand," she said, coldly.

"If Miss Smith is indeed my ward she will be your unconscious rival, since she is the only child of the late Lord Desmond, and, therefore, in law and fact, Countess of Desmond and mistress of Field Royal."

Madeleine smiled.

"Of course she is; I never thought of that. Then Field Royal is the home to be got ready for her?"

"Of course. What home did you think I meant?"

"I thought you meant your own," bluntly.

"Mine! But for your father's generous offer I must have offered my ward the shelter of my roof, but it would have been a dull, lonely life for her."

"I thought you meant to marry her!" said Lady Madeleine, who was rather given to plain-speaking.

"Marry her!" the very tone of his voice told the girl her mistake, "I never thought of such a thing. I am a sober, middle-aged man, and she is a pretty child; besides, I could not marry her."

"Why not?"



Paul never resented the question.

"Long ago, when I was a mere lad, I thought her mother the most perfect woman I had ever met. I loved her, Lady Madeleine, but it was as one loves an angel, as one worships some bright, far-off vision. I never had a thought of her that could have wronged her; I never had a dream of what might have been had we met sooner. She was just a kind of ideal worship to me, but fate linked our names. Ordeal mischance was wrought, and so much misery brought about that I could never think of her child as a possible wife. I must love her, and protect her from all sorrow for her mother's sake, but it would be as a younger sister, an adopted child; no other relationship could seem possible to me."

The Earl had gone off to the drawing-room to order fresh coffee in the place of that which had been kept waiting such an unreasonable time. The two were alone; the girl who loved so wildly, the man who had just awoke to the thought of what a home might be with such a fair and gracious woman as his queen.

"You must have thought me very foolish," she said, simply. "Please forgive me."

"There is nothing to forgive."

"It was meddlesome and presumptuous of me to think about—"

He stopped her, and taking both her hands in his said, gravely,—

"Lady Madeleine, it was neither meddlesome nor presumptuous. You don't know what new life your words have given me."

"How!"

He looked at her with a strange, deep tenderness shining in his eyes.

"You have made me think it possible that all my life need not be lonely, that though forty years almost have passed over my head I may yet win a woman's love."

Madeleine was looking into the fire; she did not answer him.

"My youth was wrecked by sorrow," he said, gravely. "When I recovered from its effects I found myself in middle life; it seemed useless to hope that I might win a woman's love—and without love I would rather remain as I am."

"You speak as if you were ninety," said Madeleine, striving for a light tone to hide the deep earnestness at her heart. "Mr. Clifford, I don't believe there is a woman in the world who would not feel honoured by your preference."

"But do you think one would love me, one young and fair, true and innocent, as the girl you were destined for me just now!"

"Of course."

"In spite of my forty years!"

"What does a few years matter?" asked Madeleine, petulantly; "just nothing at all; and many young men are odious—so conceited and full of themselves."

Then, feeling she had said quite sufficient, Lady Madeleine thought fit to follow her father to the drawing-room.

It was after that night Viscount Devereux received his freedom, and Lady Madeleine seemed, as it were, endowed with a new beauty, a fresh charm. She never spoke of her broken engagement; her father had told her enough of her cousin's character for her to know she was quite blameless in refusing to redeem her promise.

Viscount Devereux was at Field Royal; a very angry letter from his mother had been left unanswered. A short paragraph was sent to the papers announcing the rupture of the engagement; and Lady Madeleine, looking like anything in the world rather than a blighted, forsaken damsel, remained in London, was presented to the Queen, and further, she became one of the darlings of the London season.

Paul Clifford was still a frequent visitor at Charteris House; it was there he discussed every step in the quest for Dolly. There he came for advice, sympathy, and encouragement. He never said a word of love to Madeleine, but he treated her always as something he had a peculiar right to protect and care for, and she was content.

"I am so glad you have come; I want to speak to you dreadfully."

This was her greeting to him one of the early days in May, when he came in one afternoon when her father was out, and her chaperone

busy answering notes. Really, Lady Madeleine had given orders that she was not at home to visitors; but the footman did not regard Mr. Clifford as such, so he made his way without remonstrance to the pretty, flower-scented boudoir, where Madeleine, in a loose muslin dress, looked like some pretty apparition in blue and white.

"What is it, child?"

He often called her "child," and from him she never resented the title, preferring it in her heart infinitely to the more formal "Lady Madeleine."

She smiled as though to impress upon him the fact she had good news, and then she said, simply,—

"I have found her."

"Found her?"

Lady Madeleine nodded.

"Don't you think I was very clever?"

Mr. Clifford sat down, drew his chair close to Madeleine's, and said, gravely,—

"Now tell me everything."

"It is not much. You know I always persisted in the belief her mother was dead. I couldn't get you to believe me, but yesterday the idea came into my head that if Mrs. Smith died she must have had a doctor. Now, my cousin, Isola Pemberton, is married to a medical man, who has an enormous practice, and rather prefers poor patients to rich ones. I felt sure if Mrs. Smith had been taken suddenly ill he would have been sent for. I only wish I had thought of it before. Of course I went over to Isola's yesterday, invited myself to dinner, and cross-examined the doctor to my heart's content."

"Well."

"He did have a patient of the name of Smith, and she had a daughter called 'Dolly.' Don't you think I'm a wizard, Mr. Clifford?"

"I always thought wizards were of the masculine persuasion, child!"

"Well, a witch, then."

He smiled.

"I'll concede that much. Now, do go on." "There isn't much more to tell"—involuntarily her voice grew grave—"Mrs. Smith died on New Year's Night—only fancy, the very night 'Dolly' was singing here—and Dr. Pemberton, struck with the girl's loneliness, got his wife to find her a situation."

"And she is there now?"

"She was there last week, when Isola had a letter from her employer praising her virtues. Now, Mr. Clifford, I want you to guess who that employer is."

"I never guessed anything to my life."

"Then I will tell you at once—my aunt!"

"Not Lady Diamond?"

"Even so!"

A long pause. Madeleine broke it.

"Does it not seem warrantable? Here we have been seeking her far and wide, and she has been quietly living at Field Royal. Mr. Clifford, don't you think it is more than a coincidence? Don't you believe Providence itself must have guided her to the home that is really hers?"

Paul Clifford looked dazed.

"I cannot understand it."

Madeleine felt injured.

"I thought you would be so glad."

"My dear, I am glad—thankful, indeed, first to Heaven and then to you; but I cannot conceive how your aunt has brought herself to keep Dolly—I can't call her Miss Smith—in the house. She must know who she is! Do you think her resemblance which struck me so forcibly would have passed unnoticed by her?"

Madeleine blushed.

"Do you know what I fancied?"

"Tell me!"

"You know Jack admires beauty, and—and, of course, he is free now. Perhaps they are keeping Dolly in ignorance of her own wealth in the hope that she will marry him. It would seem wonderfully disinterested of him to propose to his sister's governess, and very generous in his parents to approve. Then, you know, Jack is not bad-looking! I think that is it. They thought if once she was his wife Field Royal would be Jack's beyond the slightest chance of loss!"

Mr. Clifford looked at Madeleine. He seemed to be thinking of her more than of Dolly.

"Should you mind?"

"Mind!" repeated the girl, in a puzzled tone.

"I don't know—I don't think Jack is worthy of her; but then if she loved him, perhaps that wouldn't matter."

"I meant, should you mind for yourself?"

"Mr. Clifford, I thought you knew that was all over long ago. I never cared for my cousin in that way. I was so young, and my aunt persuaded me, or we should never have been engaged."

"Are you sure?"

"I am so sure," said the heiress, wickedly, "that if Jack chose to go out to South Africa and bring home a wild Kaffir as a bride, although I might decline to be seen driving in the park with my new cousin, and might regard her blanket costume as slightly inelegant, I really should bear the connection with the utmost resignation."

Paul smiled; he really could not help it.

"I shall go to Northshire by to-night's mail, and call at Field Royal to-morrow. Of course, I shall at once tell my ward of her identity. Until the proofs of it can be procured will you ratify your father's invitation to me to bring her here?"

"I will."

"You don't mind!" He spoke awkwardly enough, for he was embarrassed. "You know she has had no advantages—poor child! You may have heard she was a dressmaker's assistant; you know yourself she sang for money in the streets! You can overlook all this, and welcome her!"

"She worked to help support her mother," said Madeleine, warmly; "she had a noble object for her toil. Her life is a braver, more unselfish one than I have ever led! Oh, yes, I will welcome her! Tell 'Dolly,' Mr. Clifford, she will find in me a sister."

He had come to speak about Dolly. The subject was exhausted, and yet he lingered. He was thinking how fair and sweet Madeleine looked in her spring dress of white muslin, trimmed with simple rows of ribbons. What a peaceful, restful air that boudoir had! Why could not his own home be blessed with that dear, abiding treasure!

"Madeleine," he said, suddenly, "do you remember something you once told me about two months ago?"

Madeleine blushed.

"I say a great many foolish things, I fancy," she said, gently. "I would not attempt to remember all."

"I did not think this foolish."

"What was it?"

"That years mattered nothing when people loved each other."

"Well, I do not think they signify."

"And you said you hated young men?"

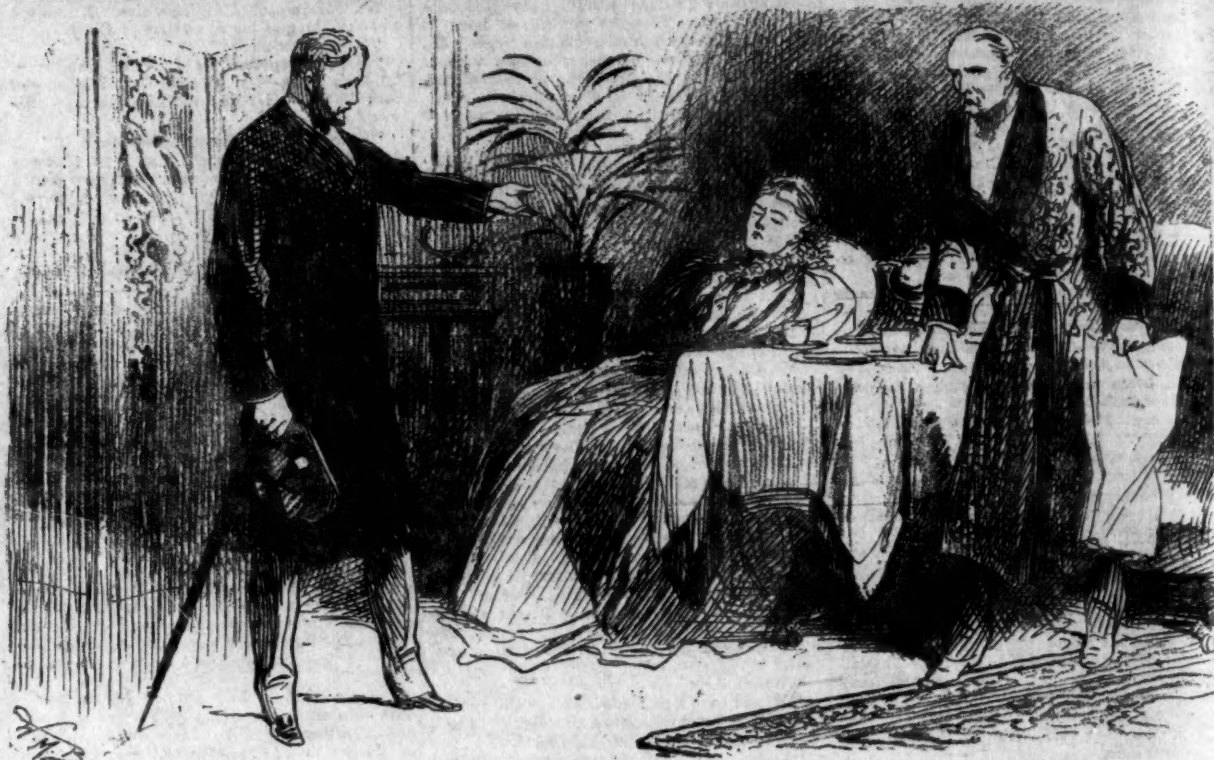
"Did I?"

"Do you know, child, those two speeches gave birth to a new, sweet hope in my heart! Even before then a desire had come to me whose fulfilment alone I knew would make me happy, but I dismissed it as impossible, presumptuous. It was only when I heard those words from you I hoped."

Madeleine played nervously with her blue ribbons. She made not the least inquiry as to what it was Paul Clifford had hoped.

"I hoped my wishes might not be all in vain. Madeleine, I have often waited to speak to you, only I could not gain courage, but I cannot let things go on as they are. I cannot bear to be so near to you and yet so far. This sweet familiar intercourse is torture to me if I can never be anything nearer than a friend. Child, in spite of the twenty years between us can you learn to love me? Madeleine, I have given you my whole heart. Dare I hope that some day you will be my cherished wife?"

They were the sweetest words that could have fallen upon her ears. She had longed for this moment, yearned for it, and feared it would never come. In spite of the long years between them she loved this man with all her heart and soul.



THE SO-CALLED LORD DEVEREUX, ASHEN PALE, STOOD TREMBLING LIKE A CRIMINAL BEFORE HIS JUDGE.

The future held nothing brighter for her than the joy of passing her life at his side.

"Look up, my darling, and answer me," he whispered. "Oh, Madeleine, end my suspense. No one will ever love you more tenderly than I. Oh! child, is it all in vain? Don't you think you could learn to love me?"

She shook her head.

"Stay!" as with an air of great dejection he was preparing to turn aside, "stay, you have not heard me out. I can never learn to love you Mr. Clifford," her eyes dropped, "because I have loved you all my life."

"Madeleine."

"Yes," she whispered, her head pillowed on his shoulder. "I can never remember a time when you did not seem to me a hero—a something immeasurably greater and nobler than other people. I used to think it was just hero-worship, but for months now I have known the truth."

"Heaven bless you, my Madeleine! Heaven knows I will do my best to prove worthy the love of your true, pure heart!"

That an hour passed in conversation, interesting only to the two concerned, will be readily believed; then Paul looked at the clock, and declared he must go. He had a few preparations to make at home, and he wanted to catch the mail train to Northshire.

"It seems hard to leave you, my darling," he said, regretfully, "and yet I cannot bear to neglect even a day in this quest we have followed together so long and hopelessly."

But Madeleine only strengthened his purpose.

"I could not love you so much if you neglected that poor orphan girl for me. Paul, do you know I was horribly jealous of her once?"

He smiled fondly.

"Oh! Madeleine."

"Well, I was. You seemed so full of interest in her, while for me, who loved you, you were cold and stern."

"I was never willingly cold to you, Made-

leine. I tried to sometimes, but I could never succeed."

"Why did you try?"

"I feared you might guess my secret, and scorn an old man's folly."

"You are not old!" indignantly.

But when he had left her, and she sat alone in the spring gloaming, happy tears rolled down her cheeks, for the desire of her life was granted her. In winning Paul Clifford's love the one treasure she had longed for was granted her.

Her lover went down by the night train to Northshire; slept at the Devereux Arms, and made his appearance at Field Royal soon after ten o'clock.

"Can I see Miss Smith?"

The footman looked so astonished that Mr. Clifford had to explain himself.

"I understood Miss Smith was residing here as governess to Lady Mabel Devereux."

"She was here," said the footman, with a marked stress on the verb, "but she left last week, sir."

He knew Mr. Clifford well, and marvelled that he should not ask for the Countess.

"I suppose you can give me her address?"

"I cannot, sir."

"Has she left for good?"

"She went in a hurry, sir, meaning to stay a few days; but since that—"

"Go on," slipping a sovereign into his hand.

"My business is of the utmost importance. I have been looking for Miss Smith for months."

"If you could only have come a week sooner, sir! If you are a friend of the young lady you won't like the tale I have to tell."

"Yet I should like to hear it."

Lord Devereux summoned all the servants together, sir, last Friday, and told them he had been basely deceived in Miss Smith, that she had robbed him right and left, and that but for her youth he would have prosecuted her for theft. He forbade her name to be mentioned.

"It is a lie!" cried Paul Clifford. "She never stooped to such a crime!"

"There's not a servant among us believed it, sir!" said John, fiercely. "And Mrs. Bond, the housekeeper, was so indignant she left on the spot. As sweet-faced a lady as ever lived, Miss Smith was; one who'd do a wrong to nobody."

"I must see your master."

"You'll find the Earl uncommonly stiff on that point; I never saw him so put out."

"I must see him. Is he at home?"

"In the library, sir, with the Countess."

"Show me to them."

Lord and Lady Desmond rose to receive their guest with outstretched hands and every expression of pleasure, but Paul Clifford never returned their greeting, never seemed even to see their outstretched hands, or to see the chair placed for him.

"I am not here as a friend," he said, coldly.

"I stand before you as the guardian of the late Lord Desmond to demand what you have done with my ward, Dorothea, Countess of Desmond, has been in your house for months. I am here to-day to demand her at your hands."

There was a smothered cry from the two who listened to Paul's fierce words; one had swooned; the other, ashen pale, stood trembling like a criminal before his judge.

(To be continued.)

The omnivorous qualities of the ostrich have hardly been exaggerated. It swallows oranges, small turtles, fowls, kittens and bones. A traveller tells of one swallowing also a box of penches, tennis balls, several yards of fencing wire, and half a dozen cartridges. One followed the workmen and picked up the wire as they cut it. Most frequently the ostrich does not swallow each dainty separately, but collects several in its throat and then swallows them all at once. Sometimes it is strangled. Its windpipe is then cut, the obstacle taken out, and the wound sewed up, when all goes well again.





THE OLD HOUSEKEEPER URGED HER BACK—"INDEED, MY LADY, THIS IS NO PLACE FOR YOU."

## THE BRIDE OF AN HOUR.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

MRS. NAIRN was very fond of Violet Dean. The very romantic circumstances of the girl's life, her utter loneliness and her dread of being forced to return to her husband, had only endeared her the more to the woman who was herself a happy wife and mother.

So that on this last evening of Miss Dean's first stage engagement, Helen Nairn had determined to make quite a festival of her home-coming. She did not always sit up until Violet's return, but to-night she allowed her husband to retire alone to nurse his cold, and having seen a very dainty little supper prepared by the maids before they went to bed, and made up what she called "A Christmas fire," Mrs. Nairn sat down in a low chair near the hearth to wait for her friend.

It was then half-past ten. The Frivolity was an "early" house, so in less than an hour Violet might be expected. Helen had a new novel in her hand to while away the time. It proved to be of such absorbing interest that she did not notice the delay of the expected cab, and it was only the striking of midnight which roused her to the fact that Violet ought to have been home long ago.

"She must have stayed talking to some of the ladies of the company," decided Mrs. Nairn; "but it is not like her, and she knew I should be sitting up alone."

Thoroughly uneasy, she put down her book and sat with strained ears to catch the sounds of the looked-for cab. She heard plenty of vehicles go by, but none of them stopped. At last, at half-past twelve, there came a sudden knock at the door.

Mrs. Nairn went into the hall with a vague sense of alarm. She knew perfectly no vehicle had stopped. Could Violet's cabman have played her false? but even then someone would

certainly have sent for another conveyance. It was impossible to think she would have been allowed to walk home.

But the person standing on the door-step proved to be not Violet Dean, but the actor-manager himself.

"Don't look so frightened, Mrs. Nairn," said Vivian St. John, kindly; "but I just wanted to ask you a question. I am very sorry to disturb you so late. Has Miss Dean got home safely?"

He had followed her into the dining-room now, and seeing how she trembled, he poured out some wine and gave it to her before he would go on with his story.

"I was detained rather late at the theatre," he said, trying hard to speak cheerfully, "and just as I was leaving I noticed a waiting cab. I hailed the man, thinking he would drive me home, and he told me that he was waiting for Miss Dean. He had driven her to-and-from the theatre for weeks. I knew there was no one left in the dressing-rooms, but I turned back with London to make inquiries. The stage-door-keeper distinctly remembered Miss Dean passing out with a gentleman, and apparently in great distress. When I questioned him further, he admitted he had seen the gentleman before. It was Mr. Leonard Maxwell, and he had brought a note for Miss Dean, which he said was of such urgent importance that it was sent in to her by the woman who acted as her dresser. I felt uneasy," went on St. John. "I knew where this woman lived, so I hunted her up. Her story is just the same, with this addition, that the note was supposed to be from you. I must confess I felt troubled. I have never been fully in your confidence; but I have suspected ever since Lord Ashdale asked me for Miss Dean's address that there was a mystery about her. No, I don't mean a word against her," as Helen began an indignant protest, "only I fancied she was a 'revolting daughter,' or some romantic damsel who had run away from home on account of love troubles."

Helen went straight upstairs, and in a very few minutes her husband, in a hurried toilet, had joined the conclave.

"The time for concealment is past," said David Nairn, very gravely, "that poor girl was Lord Ashdale's wife, and we believed last October he was plotting to get her into his power; but as the weeks passed on, and he made no attempt, our fears relaxed, and we suffered ourselves to dwell in a false security."

Mr. St. John looked troubled.

"Even now I can't see what artifice was employed. The note must have been in writing, at least, resembling yours, Mrs. Nairn, or Miss Dean would not have been deceived."

"I have known Leonard Maxwell ever since my marriage, though not so intimately as his cousin. I have written him at different times three or four notes of invitation. My hand is not an uncommon one, and would be easy to copy, only I should never have thought he would preserve such trivial notes."

"But, Nell, it was you who wrote the letter in which Violet Dean refused to see Lord Ashdale, and referred him to her lawyer," interposed David. "If Lord Ashdale and Leonard Maxwell are acting in collusion, Leonard would see that letter and recognise your writing. He had a strange—almost a dangerous—gift for imitating handwriting, so the rest would be easy."

"But," interposed the actor-manager, "granted that the letter genuinely deceived Miss Dean, and she believed it to be from Mrs. Nairn, what was its import? Mrs. Nairn was at home here; how could any letter from her send Miss Dean on a railway journey? One of the people I cross-questioned saw Maxwell hand her into a cab, and heard her ask if they should catch the train."

And then a light broke upon Helen.

"They must have written that Bernard was dying, and had asked to say good-bye to her. Oh, David! how can people be so cruel and heartless? Isn't it enough that Leonard has forsaken his cousin utterly, after taking his kindness for

years? Why must he conceive such a cruel plot against Violet?"

Vivian St. John looked from the husband to the wife with a glimmering of comprehension. He began to see light at last.

"Am I to understand that our friend the author and my leading lady are more than friends? To tell you the truth I have wondered time after time why he did not propose to her."

"He loved Violet as his own soul, and if she had not been bound by law to Lord Ashdale I think she would have made him happy."

"You are making things clear," said St. John; "I should put it like this: Lord Ashdale, intent on recovering his wife, has been 'lying low' all this time, but has been carefully ferreting out all the details in her life likely to help him. He waits till the run of *Broken Fetters* is over because he knows the disappearance of the leading actress would create a scandal; then he plots thus: If he can once get his wife into his power he trusts to his own persuasions to the bribes he can offer to keep her there. He knows you are unapproachable, but he believes she has an interest in the author whose play has made her famous; with a promise of ample reward he gets this man's cousin to see Miss Dean and assure her Bernard Maxwell is dying, and wants to bid her farewell. To lull any scruples she may have Leonard brings a note from Mrs. Nairn approving her departure."

David Nairn groaned.

"I have no doubt you are right, but—how are we to find her? How can we punish her persecutor?"

St. John shook his head.

"I don't think a man can be punished for running away with his own wife. All we can do is to trace Leonard Maxwell and find out how he spent to-night; that will give us a clue to where Miss Dean is, but even then I don't see our next step; if she is with her husband he may refuse us all access to her."

"Bernard is at Richmond," said Helen Nairn, "so they would be obliged to take Violet first to Waterloo, because it is the terminus for Richmond. Then they would get there so late there would not be many trains starting; surely the railway officials will remember the couple, Violet is too beautiful to be easily forgotten."

David Nairn suggested that St. John should sleep in the spare room and be ready to go with him to Waterloo station early in the morning. In reply to Nell's remonstrances about his cold he retorted he believed the excitement had cured it, and anyway he should never respect himself again if he did not do his utmost for a helpless girl who had lived under his roof for months.

The three made a pretence of supper, and then retired to try and sleep away what remained of the night.

Late as it had been when she went to bed, Mrs. Nairn presided at the eight o'clock breakfast which had been prepared for the two gentlemen.

"I can't tell you when I shall be back, Nell," said her husband; "we shall follow up any clue we find, and it may mean a long journey. Anyway, I shall be here soon enough to open the shop to-morrow morning; keep up your spirits, dear, and try to look on the bright side."

They had a cab to Waterloo, and were strangely silent during the drive. St. John was thinking Violet Dean must surely have had other qualities than her grace and beauty to have made herself so beloved in the music-seller's home; and David Nairn a pang at his heart for his friend wondered how would Bernard take the catastrophe?

They were fortunate enough to come upon a porter who had been on duty up to midnight the previous evening. He was just coming on after eight hours off, and, Sunday being a leisurely day (in winter), he did not object to pocket St. John's half-crown and try to answer a few questions.

"A lady and gentleman?" he rubbed his chin reflectively. "There was a couple drove up about eleven o'clock. I noticed them particular because the lady was so pretty, though she looked as if she'd cried her eyes out. It's not every pretty face crying doesn't spoil. She was dressed

in black, and had a small hat with a white wing in it."

"I got my wife to write down what the poor girl had on," said Nairn, meekly, reading from a slip of paper, "plain black cashmere dress fitting jacket of rough cloth, small velvet hat with white wing."

"That's it, sir," said the porter, approvingly; "she asked me in a faint sort of voice if there was another train to Richmond that night, and I told her two. But the oddest part's to come. The gent left her in the waiting-room while he took the tickets, and I heard him myself ask for two fares to Woking."

"Woking!" exclaimed St. John. "What on earth made him choose Woking?"

"Law, sir," said the porter, "it might be a blind, the eleven-fifty goes no further than Woking, but it stops five or six times before it gets there, and there could be nothing to prevent them getting out somewhere else."

They thanked the porter and turned into a waiting-room to discuss the next move.

"There's no doubt that Leonard Maxwell was in Lord Ashdale's pay and that poor girl is now in her husband's power," said St. John, thoughtfully. "If we find the Earl we find her."

"Yes, but, on the other hand, if we find out where Leonard Maxwell and his victim left the train we shall be on the trail, and unravel the mystery sooner."

"Perhaps! I wonder if we could unearth the guard of the eleven-fifty train."

But the guard was off duty.

"Where is Lord Ashdale's own house?" asked St. John of the music-seller.

"His chief estate is Waldon Castle, but depend upon it he has two or three other smaller places."

"Then I have it. We must get a directory of Surrey and find out if he has a house within a few miles of any of the stations this side of Woking; if so, depend upon it, a carriage was waiting there and Violet Dean was conveyed to what should have been her own home, but is now her prison."

#### CHAPTER XXIV.

VIOLET was so near fainting with suspense and fatigue that when Leonard Maxwell begged her to take some refreshment at Waterloo Station she consented at once. He pointed out to her that she would need all her strength for the farewell interview with his cousin, and that if she reached Mrs. Fieelde's house worn out and exhausted she would not be fit for the meeting with Bernard. There was sound common-sense in the argument, and Violet drank some brandy and water after making an attempt to swallow a ham sandwich which nearly stuck in her throat, then her escort told her the time was up and escorted her to a first-class carriage, where a respectably-dressed elderly woman was already seated.

The girl who had gone through so much in her short life felt grateful for the feminine companionship thus secured her. She had not the least doubt of the letter from Helen Nairn. She believed Leonard to be genuinely acting in good faith as his cousin's ambassador, but for all that in her agitated troubled state she was glad she was not to make this midnight journey *à la deux* with him.

"We shall be quite half-an-hour before we reach our destination," said Leonard, kindly, "won't you try to rest a little? You will want all your strength by-and-bye."

Veronica would have declared that sleep was out of the question, and yet she had not been many minutes in the train before her eyes closed and she was wrapped in slumber so deep that she never heard her two companions begin a conversation.

"She looks very delicate," said the respectable woman, gravely. "Lord Ashdale told me she had only just recovered from a serious illness."

"It's been very rough on my uncle," explained Leonard. "She was taken ill on their wedding tour and has been under medical care ever since. She is reported cured now, but I am afraid a few delusions still remain. She seems

to have forgotten all about her marriage and to regard my uncle as her enemy."

"That will pass when she gets stronger," said the woman, who was in fact a lady's maid with experience in mental cases (*vide her advertisement*), "and she's a bride worth waiting for. I understood from Lord Ashdale that Creswell Grange was a remote place in the country and he wanted the Countess to spend a few weeks there until her cure was completed and she could take her place as mistress of Waldon Castle."

"That's it. He does not want any talk about her ailments. There are very few servants at the Grange, in fact, only just enough to attend upon himself and my aunt, and he hopes to represent to them that Lady Ashdale has only been suffering from weak lungs."

The woman nodded.

"I'll be careful, sir."

The train stopped at a small country station and Leonard sprang out. Veronica still slept, but he and the maid between them lifted her out and the woman supported her to a seat, while Leonard went to see if his uncle was anywhere about.

No; Lord Ashdale had not come, but the carriage from the Grange was waiting. The coachman and footman must have thought their lady still very ill, for she was lifted into it. Then Leonard gave the word of command, "Home!"

"You will understand," he told the maid, "Lady Ashdale has been residing abroad. The boat was delayed through stormy weather, otherwise we should have left London much earlier."

She nodded her head assent. She was a sensible woman, but she had no suspicion the story palmed off on her was false. In a long experience of mental cases she knew that patients often did turn against their homes and their nearest relations; she was also aware that in a case of recovery, a family always showed almost morbid anxiety lest the real nature of their dear one's late illness should become known. Considering Lord Ashdale's exalted rank, the maid was not in the least surprised at his desire for secrecy.

The Earl was standing in the hall ready to greet his wife. He kissed the still, sleeping face with a passion which showed that his love (if it deserved the name) had only strengthened with absence. Then he suffered the maid to take Veronica upstairs. Their first interview must wait till the morning.

The tardy December sun was trying to enter through the closed curtains when Veronica awoke. She started up in bed and looked round. Everything was strange. What had happened?

She jumped out of bed and plunged her face and head into cold water; the sudden shock was bracing. She found that the dazed, confused feeling had left her, and she could think clearly.

But by this time all came back to her. The note brought to the theatre; the news of Bernard's danger; the midnight journey. But what followed? Could this be Mrs. Fieelde's house; and had she arrived too late to see her friend alive? What did it mean?

Mrs. Brook, entering with a tray of breakfast, was surprised to see Lady Ashdale sitting in a chair by the fire.

"I am sorry I did not come sooner, my lady. I was waiting for your bell."

Veronica stared at her.

"Will you tell me the name of this house?"

"Creswell Grange, my lady, about seven miles from Walton."

"And who lives here?"

"No one lives here all the year round, my lady. Lord Ashdale uses it as a shooting lodge in the autumn. He thought it would be pleasant for you to come here, after your long illness, than to go to Waldon Castle, where you would be expected to entertain the county."

The truth broke on Veronica. The letter brought her the night before was a forgery. Bernard's illness had been used as an excuse to lure her away from her friends. She was in her husband's power.

She must have changed strangely from the frightened, timid girl of a year ago, the creature of smiles and tears; for though her very heart



ached with misery, she was perfectly calm, not even one cry escaped her.

"And I suppose you are my maid!" she said at last. "Weren't you in the railway carriage last night?"

"Yes, my lady. Mr. Maxwell said I had better not force myself on your notice, as you were so tired after your long journey from France."

"I think, if you go now, I will get dressed," said Veronica. "No, you cannot help me. I always dress myself. I shall be down in an hour."

The toilet would not take half that time, but she wanted to secure a little solitude to think. Of course she was a prisoner in her husband's house, and it was useless to appeal to his compassion. She would, probably, be watched so closely that escape was impossible. Well; if she knew anything of friendship, the Nairns would not relax their efforts till they had found out her prison; and then their lawyer cousin would have to demand her release. And if no other course availed, she must file a petition for a legal separation. It was a terrible ordeal, but it was better than giving way and becoming Lord Ashdale's wife in deed as well as name.

Through all her agony Veronica had just this ray of joy. If the letter was forged, the report of Bernard's danger was false. She need not think of him as dying. She would yet see him again.

She realised, too, that her position was better than it had been a year ago. She was not a frightened girl, but a woman who had earned her own living for over twelve months, and even won for herself a lasting fame. She found that her purse had been removed from her pocket. Her shoes had disappeared, though in their place stood a dainty pair of thin satin slippers. Her hat and coat, too, were gone.

Lord Ashdale's object was plain; he wanted to make it impossible for her to run away again.

Punctually as the last moment of the hour was reached, Veronica opened her door. It did not in the least surprise her to find Mrs. Brook waiting outside.

"Breakfast is served in the library, my lady, for you hardly touched what I brought you. His lordship is waiting for you there."

She led the way downstairs, opened a door at the end of a long passage, and closed it on her lady. Lord Ashdale and his wife were together for the first time since they parted at the Court on their wedding-day.

"Veronica!"

He would have caught her in his arms and pressed hot kisses on her fair face, but she eluded him, and took refuge at the further end of the room behind a large screen.

"Don't be a goose," said the Earl, rather amused. "Come and talk to me, it's no use, Vera, we must have things out."

"I will talk to you if you promise not to touch me," she retorted. "You used to be a gentleman, and I think you will keep your word."

"I am glad you do me no much justice. Well, come out and breakfast with me; I promise on my word of honour that I won't touch even the tip of your finger."

She looked so distractingly beautiful as she moved slowly towards the breakfast-table, that he rather repented this promise.

"Now," he said, when breakfast was over, "come into the next room and talk to me. It's no use refusing, Vera, if you drive me to extremities you'll repent it."

She blushed a vivid crimson as she followed him into an inner room furnished as a boudoir. He placed a large easy chair for her, but himself remained standing.

"I am waiting for your explanation," he said, coolly. "Why did you run away from me?"

"Because after I had heard Mrs. Lorne's story I hated you, and nothing in the world would induce me to live with you."

"Hum! A girl of your age is not a very good judge of such matters! I do not think you can accuse me of any wrong against you. From the moment I first saw you until you left me on our wedding-day, my one object was to make you happy."

"You were very, very kind," she admitted, slowly, "but—"

"But what! Veronica, I think at least you owe me perfect frankness."

"You shall have it," said the girl, "only it is so difficult to explain, but I will try. When I met you at Walden I was a perfect child."

"Which constituted your great charm in my eyes," put in the Earl.

"I was desperately unhappy at home. Mother was never pleased at anything I did, she made my life miserable as it was, but if I had refused to marry you it would have been a martyrdom. When you asked me to be your wife, I told you frankly that I did not love you, and you said love would come."

"You have hardly given it much chance," he put in.

"Please let me finish. I—I was a child, and I knew nothing, I thought it very good of you to want to marry me, I thought it would be just like living with some quiet, fatherly friend, and—"

"I don't like the rôle you assign me, but go on."

"When we went to Margrave Court I got frightened, it was coming so near, as we drove home from church together I seemed to realise what I had done, and that I was bound for my whole life to a man I did not love,—then you know what Mrs. Lorne told me."

"I can guess; but I will swear to you she was not so deceived as she pretended. No woman in the world could have believed that I, a man of boundless wealth and with no one to consult, should have to keep my wife hidden in obscurity. She knew the truth."

Veronica blushed crimson.

"When I had listened to her I felt I could never take her place, that a curse would surely fall on me if I did. Don't misunderstand me, I knew that in law I was your wife, but I thought that in Heaven's sight she had a better right to the name."

"And so you ran away?"

"I ran away. I suffered poverty, cold and hardships of every description; once I had not a shilling in the world, and I came very near taking my own life. That very day I got a situation at a music-shop to try over purchases for customers."

"You must be a very brave girl to tell me this," said Lord Ashdale, "to confess you preferred death to my embraces is rather strong."

She looked at him without flinching, her beautiful eyes seemed to read him through and through.

"I think there are a great many women who would be satisfied with riches and grandeur, and be quite content no matter what sort of man gave them—but only love would satisfy me."

"Well, you can't deny I love you!"

"You don't really love me," she replied, "or you would try to make me happy. You like to think I am your wife, because I have good eyes and a soft skin, and you think I should do you credit. If I were to lose my beauty you would never care to see me again."

"By George! You hit hard."

"But it is true."

"Look here, Veronica. You must come down from heroics, and listen to me. I shall not talk to you as if you were a child. The day for that is over. You have lived in London for a year. You have been an actress. You must know the world by this time."

"Well?"

"Then listen to me. I am only just fifty. I come of a long-lived family; it is not taking too rosy a view to say that I may have from twenty-five to thirty years to live."

"As Heaven is my witness," said Veronica, "I never wished you dead. In all my troubles, all my longings for freedom it never came into my heart to desire your death."

"I believe you," he answered, simply. "Now, don't interrupt me again. I want to speak plainly once for all. Granted, I have twenty-five or thirty years to live, you will be forty-five or fifty when you are a widow. Now, I am a man of strong will, nothing has ever turned me from my purpose, so you may believe me when

I say that only my death shall release you from your vows. Whatever you do (and I don't believe you are of the stuff that stoops to guilt) I shall never divorce you."

"From this it follows that while I live you can never make another honourable alliance. You either condemn yourself to live alone, or else you drag another human soul as well as your own into sin. You are very quick to reproach me for my offence against Mrs. Lorne. How about yourself! Does it strike you that it is wives like you who drive men into sin?"

She was silent, but she had turned white as death.

"I know more than you think," said the Earl, "for I have made it my business to find out. Only one man found favour with the leading actresses of the Fivoliity. Only one man could boast of her smiles. Oh, I am not accusing him or you of wrong, but I believe that if I were dead Bernard Maxwell would ask you to be his wife, and you would accept him."

"Mr. Maxwell is my friend, he would never—"

"I tell you I don't accuse him of wrong, but listen. Will friendship satisfy him through twenty or thirty years? If not, and you both cross the Rubicon I tell you I shall never sue for a divorce, and he can never right the wrong. Shall I tell you what would happen to you both. He would never hold up his head again or do another stroke of good work. That man is of the sensitive organisation that makes a genius. He would never stand up against disgrace."

Veronica listened as in a dream.

"Do you know how I was enticed here," she broke out, passionately. "Do you call that honourable?"

"My dear, your rightful place is your husband's home, and any means that brought you back to it would be lawful. If you ask if I think Leonard Maxwell honourable, I think him a disgrace to manhood, but one has to make use of queer tools sometimes."

Veronica drew a little nearer the Earl.

"Won't you let me go away. I will give you my solemn promise never to see Mr. Maxwell again. I will leave the stage, and—"

Lord Ashdale shook his head.

"If you leave the stage what interest will you have in life! You are just twenty. Suppose, for example's sake, I agree to let you go away from me what happens! You can't live with the Nairns because Maxwell is their friend. Supposing you accepted an allowance from me and lived alone with a duenna wouldn't you be miserable?"

"It seems to me," said Veronica, sadly. "I shall be miserable whatever happens."

"You said just now that I never broke my word," said Lord Ashdale, "and you only did me justice. Now, if I make you a fair offer will you at least consider it calmly? Will you remember, too, that you ought to think not only of yourself but of two men. Of the one who is your husband and has never broken his marriage vows, and of the other who loves you to his own dishonour."

Veronica winced.

"I am listening," she said, gravely.

"Will you agree to live under my roof if I give you my solemn promise that for six months I will not ask you to be more to me than a friend? Listen, if you write to St. John and tell him he must find another heroine before *Broken Fetters* is put on again, the theatrical world need never know that Violet Dean was Lady Ashdale. To Mrs. Nairn—who has been a true friend to you—you may explain the truth, that finding me determined not to resign you while I lived, you had gone back to my protection since you found the rôle of a married woman living in supposed freedom too difficult."

"I give you my word of honour that for six months I will leave you absolutely free. Then after I have had a fair chance of winning your heart, I shall remind you of your marriage vows."

She was pale as death.

"Will you give me time to think?"

"I will give you till to-morrow morning. I

have no doubt that the Nairns will institute a search for you, and to save them much trouble and expense, they ought to know your decision to-morrow."

"Lord Ashdale!"

"What is it, Veronica?"

"Will you tell me what has become of them, Mrs. Lorne and her little girl?"

"The child died in the spring of scarlet fever, and the mother has been almost mad ever since. Fox told me once he believed if she ever met me she would attempt my life. Although the little girl died in France where Mrs. Lorne had gone quite unknown to me, it pleased her to think I was the sole cause of the child's death. And now, Veronica, remember you are on your word of honour not to leave me until to-morrow. You are free to wander where you will in this old house. The servants will obey you as their mistress. All is at your command. At breakfast to-morrow you must give me your reply. Is it to be war between us or peace?"

"Will you do one thing for me?" she pleaded. "Do not ask me to meet your nephew. I think I despise and dislike him more than any human creature I ever heard of."

"You need not fear meeting Leonard. He found a telegram here last night, sent on from Cadogan-place. Lady Melton is dying in Yorkshire from a carriage accident, and his one chance of finding her alive was to start at once. He caught the first train this morning, and has been gone for hours."

Lord Ashdale came a few paces nearer to his wife.

"I promised you just now, Veronica, I would not even touch your finger. I want you to give me your hand of your own free will. It is a strange thing. I saw you first only three months before our wedding, then I lost you again till today. We have been very little together, and yet I love you with every fibre of my heart."

She gave him her hand. He pressed it passionately to his lips. Another moment and he was gone.

## CHAPTER XXV.

It was probably about eleven when the Earl left Veronica; she took up a book and tried to read, but it was of no use, the catastrophe of her own life was too thrilling for her to take any interest in the printed woes of others. A terrible struggle was going on in her heart. Was her husband right, and did her duty really lie with him? Was it possible that danger lay in her self-chosen course, and that if she persevered in it she might wreck her whole life and Bernard Maxwell's career?

A servant came in to say that lunch was served, and the Earl was not in, would she have hers alone? Veronica sent back word she would wait for Lord Ashdale.

She must have sat on another hour or more, when she was roused by the tramp of many feet. Hardly knowing what she did, she went out into the hall. The old housekeeper would have urged her back.

"Indeed, my lady, this is no place for you."

"But what has happened?"

"There has been an accident to the Earl in the park; they are bringing him in, and John has gone for the doctor."

Four men entered bearing on a shutter the husband she had parted from only that morning so well and strong. Lord Ashdale was carried to his own room and laid on the sofa. Veronica followed, she felt it was her place now. The doctor, summoned in hot haste, found the Countess on her knees by the couch chafing one of the ice cold hands in hers.

"My dear," said the old man, with strong emotion, "you can do no good. Life is extinct. Let me take you away."

When he had led her to the library, and she grew calmer, he told her what had happened. Lord Ashdale was riding in the park, when a woman suddenly placed herself in his path, and fired a revolver, aimed straight at his heart. The groom had hastily given the alarm, and the woman was arrested on the spot. At first there

was a faint hope that the Earl still lived, and he had been carried home with every care, but life was extinct before his bearers reached the house.

"Several people have noticed the woman hanging about lately," said Dr. Gibson, "she seemed always watching for someone. She had good lodgings in Woking, so she could not be taken up as a vagrant, but she spent her whole time in wandering about this neighbourhood."

Veronica possessed the clue which the kind old doctor lacked and guessed at once that her husband's murderer was Margaret Lorne.

Dr. Gibson was most anxious to send for someone to be of comfort to the young countess. He knew she had only just come home after a long illness, and he feared the effect of the shock upon her.

"Have your mother or sister you would like me to send for?" he asked.

Veronica shook her head.

"My mother and I could not meet without more pain than pleasure; but if I may really send for a friend to be with me I would rather have Mrs. Nairn than anyone in the world. I think her husband would bring her; and I should like Mr. Fox, Lord Ashdale's lawyer, to be sent for, too."

It was easy to send to London. Waldon was a different matter; but a telegram was dispatched to the nearest telegraph-office doing Sunday business, and they sent it out by a mounted messenger. The Nairns were with Veronica by seven that night, and a wire announced that Mr. Fox was starting from Waldon that night, and hoped to be at the Grange by the morning.

Helen had heard the outline of the story from Dr. Gibson's messenger, and she said at once to her husband:

"No one must ever know from us how Lady Ashdale happened to be in her husband's house. I feel as if I could almost forgive Leonard Maxwell."

Veronica threw herself into Helen's arms, the strain of the last few hours had been too much for her.

"Oh, Helen," she pleaded, "tell me it was not my fault. Indeed, indeed, I never wished for his death, and we parted friends."

"It was not your fault, dear," Helen assured her. "From all I hear, that miserable woman has been dogging Lord Ashdale's steps ever since he came here on Friday."

Of course there was an inquest, and the coroner's jury returned a verdict of wilful murder against Margaret Lorne, but it was soon generally understood that there would be no trial. Two doctors of known repute were ready to testify the miserable woman was hopelessly insane, and that her life was only a question of days. To some it seemed a strange coincidence that she should die on the same afternoon as Lord Ashdale's funeral.

Mr. Fox was the sole executor to the Earl's will, and had the ordering of his funeral. It was sad, people said, that not one member of the dead man's family followed him to the grave. His nephew, Leonard Maxwell, had been killed within a few hours of his uncle, by a railway accident in Yorkshire, and the next heir was a far-off cousin, now a successful sheep-farmer in Australia.

Lord Ashdale's will, made just after his marriage, was very short. He bequeathed everything he possessed (that was not entailed) to his dear wife Veronica, on the sole condition that she should bequeath it intact to some one person, and not divide it into small fragments or leave it to charity.

When Veronica was told of this she declared she could not take the money, which amounted to fifty thousand pounds, besides a pretty little house near the sea, but Helen Nairn told her she had no right to cast a slight upon her husband's memory by refusing.

"Recollect the will was made after you had left him," she said, gently; "and, besides, at least you parted from him in peace."

"I shall always be glad I did," said Veronica.

It was Mr. Nairn who called on Vivian St. John, and told him he must look out for another leading lady. The actor-manager nodded.

"I knew as much as soon as I read of Lord

Ashdale's death. I suppose she will go back to her own name now."

"Yes, she will live at Ravenhurst, a little place he has left her near Dover, and have about three thousand a year; but she isn't twenty, and except my wife she hasn't a woman friend in the world."

"Her mother will want to live with her."

"Her mother has just married, herself, a gouty old admiral, who is never happy out of Scotland. I believe Mrs. Leigh fancied he was in bad health and she should soon be a wealthy widow."

In the end Veronica was not so lonely as Mr. Nairn had feared. Sir Lionel and Lady Leigh, feeling their niece had been more sinned against than sinning, went down to Ravenhurst and were formally reconciled to Veronica; Lady Leigh, indeed, touched by the pathetic beauty of the young widow, agreed to stay with her niece while Sir Lionel went on a trip to Australia, where their younger daughter was now a bride. The Baronet loved the sea, and his wife hated it; she declared the young couple must come home every few years and see her, for the voyage to the Antipodes was beyond her.

She proved the best companion Veronica could have had, gentle, kind, and motherly, her very calm was soothing to one who had suffered so much, and when Sir Lionel returned in June, to claim his wife, he found Lady Ashdale a new creature.

She never went to Margrave Court, its memories were too sad; but she paid them frequent visits at their town house, and it was there, just eighteen months after the Earl's death, that she told Lady Leigh she was going to be married.

"I know you may think it soon," she said frankly, "but I was never Lord Ashdale's wife in sight but name. I am nearly twenty-two, and I love Mr. Maxwell with all my heart. He cares nothing for my money; he would like me to give it up, but it seems to me, somehow, to do so would be a slight to the Earl's memory."

"You must keep the money," said Lady Leigh promptly, "and I, for one, shall never blame you for marrying again. Which Mr. Maxwell is it? You cannot mean the celebrated author!"

"Yes; he wasn't celebrated when I knew him first. Aunt Grace, I suffered very deeply once for marrying to please my mother; won't you wish me happiness now I am marrying to please myself?"

And with tear-wet eyes Lady Leigh promised that she would.

It was an August wedding in a London church, with no bridesmaids, no stately throng of guests, no grand toilets. Veronica wore a dress of soft grey silk; Helen Nairn and her two little girls were the only spectators except the music-seller, who gave away the bride. And this time Veronica drove straight from the church to the railway station, and had started on her honeymoon within an hour of changing her name. This time she had no fear of her husband; no regret for the vows she had breathed to him; for to Bernard Maxwell she was a true and loving wife—not merely THE BRIDE OF AN HOUR.

[THE END.]

SCIENTIFIC and military experts give some excellent reasons why infantry soldiers should wear scarlet coats. Scarlet affords the best attainable protection against the extremes of heat and cold to which soldiers are liable to be exposed. It takes a far higher place than any of the blues, greens, or drabs and other shades often used for military clothing. Although scarlet is more conspicuous than gray, when the sun shines directly on the troops it blurs the sight, and is consequently more difficult to hit. It is a distinct advantage that men should bulk large in the decisive stages of an encounter, and there is no colour which enables them to do this so effectively as scarlet.

"THE HUMAN HAIR: Its Restoration and Preservation." A Practical Treatise on Baldness, Greyness, Superfuous Hair, &c. 40 pages. Post-free six stamps from Dr. HORN, Hair Specialist, Bournemouth.



## THE RIVAL SISTERS.

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

"Has the little beauty bewitched me, I wonder?" muttered the young doctor, Ralph Manning, pacing up and down the magnificent office. "I experienced such a thrill, such a strange emotion, the instant her eyes met mine, that I realised I had met the one girl in all the world for me. My brain was in a whirl all the time she sat here. I realised, the minute she mentioned the name Lois, that I had heard it somewhere before; but, hang it all! I couldn't recall where for the life of me; and now, an hour after she has gone, I recollect just where I had heard the name."

"Doctor Desmond attended an old basket-maker in some tenement house, and he told me of the old man's beautiful daughter—the beautiful Lois with the raven-dark hair and midnight eyes."

"Philip fairly raved over her. I remember him quoting the lines, in speaking of her:

"A modest flower born to blush unseen,  
And waste its sweetness on the desert air."

Yes, he seemed fairly in love with her.

"Why couldn't I have thought of all this an hour ago! I was a fool, an unamalgated fool, to let a pair of eyes bewitch me so that I could not even think."

"It will be two whole days until I see her again. I do not know how I shall live through them, my suspense will be so great. What if she should never come again, and, as she explained in her case, I do not even know her name or address!"

But, much to the delight of Doctor Manning, the little beauty did call again, at the very hour he had set. But his pleasure had one drawback to it, she was heavily veiled. But, for all that, he knew how lovely was the face that veil concealed, how bright the eyes, how charming the dimples, how white the pearly teeth, how sweet the ripe red cheeks, so like Cupid's bow.

He could not conceal his great joy at beholding her again. She noticed his emotion at once. He would not have been so well pleased if he could have seen how her red lip curled in scorn as she said to herself:

"Fools fall in love with a pretty face at sight; but it is another thing to get a desirable man to fall in love. They are hard to win. I have heard of this Doctor Manning before. True, he did go to college with Philip Desmond, and was his chum; but one is rich and the other poor."

"I hope you have been successful," murmured Trixy, giving him her little white hand to hold for an instant—an instant during which he was intensely happy.

"Yes, my dear madam," he answered, quickly. "I am overjoyed to think I can be of service to you—in a way, at least. I did not communicate with Doctor Desmond, for it occurred to me just after you left that I had heard him mention the name; but I am sure there is a mistake somewhere. This girl—Lois—whom I refer to, and whom Doctor Desmond knows, cannot possibly be a friend of yours, miss, for she is only the daughter of an humble basket-maker, and lives on the top floor of a tenement house in one of the poorest parts of the town."

Trixy's amazement was so great she could hardly repress the cry of amazement that arose to her lips.

She had never for an instant doubted that this beautiful Lois, who had won the proud, unbending heart of haughty Philip Desmond, was some great heiress, royal in her pomp and pride, and worth millions of money. No wonder Doctor Manning's words almost took her breath away.

"Are you quite sure?" she responded, after a moment's pause. "Surely, as you remarked, then there must be some mistake."

"I am positive Doctor Desmond knows but this one Lois. In fact, I heard him say that he never remembered hearing that beautiful name until

he heard it for the first time in the humble home of the old basket-maker. And he went on to tell me how lovely the girl was, despite her surroundings."

"Is she dark or fair?" asked Trixy, hoarsely.

"She looks very much like yourself, I should judge, by his description of the girl to me, though she must be taller by half a head. He spoke of her wondrous eyes, her beautiful hair, the deep glow on cheek and lip, the daintily moulded patrician features, the olive skin, and the small, slender hands, so shapely though they were ever busy with her work at basket-making."

"He must have talked as though he were in love with this Lois," murmured the veiled lady, with a hoarse laugh.

"That is true," confessed young Doctor Manning. "And I believe if he was not engaged to another girl, he would surely have lost his heart to this beautiful Lois of the tenement house. He admitted as much."

The veiled lady rose hastily, her hands clinched.

"I thank you for your information," she said, huskily, as she moved rapidly towards the door.

"She is going without my even knowing who she is," thought Doctor Manning, and he sprang from his chair, saying, eagerly:

"I beg a thousand pardons if the remark I am about to make seems presumptuous; but believe that it comes from a heart not prompted by idle curiosity—far, far from that."

"What is it that you wish to know?" asked Trixy, curiously.

"Who you are," he replied, with blunt eagerness. "I may as well tell you the truth. I am deeply interested in you, even though you are a stranger, and the bare possibility that we may never meet again fills me with the keenest sorrow I have ever experienced."

Trixy Pomeroy was equal to the occasion.

"I must throw him off the track at once by giving him a false name and address," she thought.

She hesitated only a moment.

"My name is Rae Thorne," she replied, uttering the falsehood without the slightest quiver in her voice. "I attend a private school for young ladies. We are soon to have a public reception, to which we are entitled to invite our friends, and I should be pleased to send you a card if you think you would care to attend."

"I should be delighted," declared Doctor Manning, eagerly. "If you honour me with an invitation, I shall be sure to be present. I would not miss seeing you again."

Was it only his fancy, or did he hear a smothered laugh from beneath the thick dark veil which hid the girl's face from his view?

The next moment Trixy was gone, and the young doctor gazed after her as he did on the former occasion, with a sigh, and already began looking forward to the time when he should see her again. Meanwhile Trixy lost no time in finding the street and house indicated.

A look of intense amazement overspread her face as she stood in front of the tall, forbidding tenement and looked up at the narrow, grimy windows. It seemed almost incredible that handsome, fastidious Philip Desmond would even come to such a place, let alone fall in love with an inmate of it.

"The girl must be a coarse, ill-bred working-girl," she told herself, "no matter how pretty her face may be."

A number of fleshy, ill-clad women, holding still more poorly clad, fretful children, set on the doorstep, hung out of the open windows and over the balusters, gossiping and slandering their neighbours quite as energetically as the potted wives of the upper ten thousand.

Trixy took all this in with a disgusted glance; but lifting her dainty, lace-trimmed linen skirts, she advanced boldly.

"I am in search of a basket-maker who lives somewhere in this vicinity," said Trixy. "Could you tell me if he lives here?"

"He lives right here," spoke up one of the women. "John Davis is out, so is the elderly woman who is staying with him; but Miss Lois is in, I am certain, working busily over her

baskets. If you want to see about baskets, she's the one to go to—top floor, right."

Trixy made her way up the narrow, dingy stairs until she reached the top floor. The door to the right stood open, and as Trixy advanced she saw a young girl turn quickly from a long pine table covered with branches of willow, and look quickly up.

Trixy Pomeroy stood still, fairly rooted to the spot with astonishment not unmingled with rage, for the girl upon whom she gazed was the most gloriously beautiful creature she had ever beheld. She did not wonder now that Philip Desmond had given his heart to her.

In that one moment a wave of such furious hate possessed the soul of Trixy Pomeroy that it was with the greatest difficulty she could restrain herself from springing upon the unconscious young girl and wrecking forever the fatal beauty which had captivated the heart of the man who was her lover and was so soon to wed.

Trixy had thrown back her veil, and was gazing at her rival with her angry soul in her eyes.

Seeing the handsomely dressed young lady, Lois came quickly forward with the sweet smile and graceful step habitual to her.

"You wish to see some one—my father, perhaps!" murmured Lois, gently.

"You are the person I wish to see," returned Trixy, harshly—"you, and no one else."

Lois looked at her wonderingly. The cold, hard voice struck her ear unpleasantly, and the strange look in the stranger's hard, steel-blue eyes made her feel strangely uncomfortable.

Was it a premonition of coming evil?

## CHAPTER XXV.

THE cool, steady scrutiny with which the stranger standing on the threshold regarded her, made Lois feel a trifle uncomfortable; but she repeated, quite as gently, in the same sweet voice,—

"Is it my father or myself you have called to see, madam?"

"If you are Lois Davis my business is with you," replied Miss Pomeroy, with a haughty, stony glare.

Lois bowed courteously, not knowing what reply to make; but, recovering her composure an instant later, she invited her visitor to enter.

Miss Pomeroy followed Lois into the shabby little sitting-room, and haughtily accepted the proffered seat.

"I have that to say to you which I would not care to have anyone else hear. Are we alone? Miss—Miss Davis, I believe they call you?"

Again Lois bowed sweetly.

"I am Lois Davis," she said, "and we are alone. There is no one about to overhear any complaint you may have to make to me. I fear I can almost guess your errand. My poor, hapless father has got into some new difficulty, and you are come to tell me of it," she added, wistfully, her tremulous voice very husky, tears shining in her dark eyes.

"No," returned Miss Pomeroy, shortly. "Your father has nothing whatever to do with my visit here."

"Oh, madam, you lift such a great load from my mind!" murmured Lois, greatly relieved, but wondering more than ever what this beautiful, fashionable-dressed young lady could want with her.

She was not to remain long in suspense.

"In the first place," began Trixy, slowly, "I wish to know what your relations are, Lois Davis, with Doctor Desmond. I must and will know the truth."

She saw that the question struck the girl as lightning strikes a fair white rose and withers and blights it with its awful fiery breath.

Lois was fairly stricken dumb. She opened her lips to speak, but no sound issued from them. She could not have uttered one syllable if her life had depended on it.

"Let me tell you how the case stands. I will utter the shameful truth for you if you dare not admit it. He is your lover in secret, though he would deny you in public!"

An expression of agony crept into the dark, terrified eyes regarding Trixy. But heedless of the pain she was inflicting, Trixy went on, sharply,—

"Has no one told you that this handsome young doctor, whom you have had the hardihood to encourage, has made you the laughing-stock of the town, the jest of all the young men about town, a by-word for shame, and a mark for scandal so horrible that honest women blush and men smile broadly and turn away at the very sound of your name?"

Lois sprang to her feet with a cry so bitter, so full of agony—wrung from the very depths of a heart wounded nigh unto death—that it would have turned any other one than Trixy Pomeroy from her purpose.

"Don't—don't!" she cried, wildly. "I cannot bear it!"

"You must listen and learn the truth," went on her visitor, pitilessly and relentlessly. "Then, if you go wrong, you cannot say that you were not fully warned of the danger that threatens you. Doctor Desmond has made open boasts that he was leading you on to suppose he cared for you, while, in fact, he only seemed to deceive you!"

The last four words fell upon Lois' ears with crushing force. Her sobbing ceased, the awful pallor of her face grew deeper, the terror in her eyes became more awful. Death itself would not have been harder to bear than the awful words which had been thrown so scathingly into her face.

"He boasts of how you are trying to entrap him into asking him to marry you, and how he eludes you, until the air resounds with the laughter of his friends as they listen."

Lois shrank back, her pure white soul almost paralysed at the bare thought.

"I have taken great pains to find you and let you know all this, and my advice to you is—never see Philip Desmond again. What do you say?"

"Oh, I will not—I will never look upon his face again!" moaned poor Lois, crying as though her very heart were being rent in twain.

"I would advise you to move away from this place, where you have been so deeply disgraced," said Miss Pomeroy, leaning forward anxiously.

"Disgraced!" repeated Lois. "No, no—not that! I have never done anything that could bring disgrace to me."

And the girl raised her beautiful dark head fearlessly and looked her rival calmly in the face.

Trixy Pomeroy saw she had used a wrong word, and hastened to modify its meaning.

"You do not quite understand," she said. "Let me explain it more clearly. All Philip Desmond's friends, and they are legion, go out of their way to pass this house, and point it out to their companions as the place where the young girl lives whom Doctor Desmond is making such a laughing-stock of."

Hapless Lois had borne all she could. But this was the last straw; and without a word, a cry, or even a moan she threw up her little hands, and fell in a lifeless heap at her cruel enemy's feet.

For a moment Trixy gazed at her victim, and thoughtfully worthy of the brain of a fiend incarnate sweep through her.

"If she were only dead!" she muttered, excitedly. "Dare I—"

The sentence was never finished. There was a step on the creaking stairs outside, and with a guilty cry of alarm, Miss Pomeroy rushed from the room and out into the darkened hall-way.

She brushed past a woman on the narrow stairs, but the darkness was so dense neither recognised the other; and Trixy had gained the street and turned the nearest corner, ere Miss Harris—for it was she—reached the top landing.

As she pushed open the door, the first object that met her startled eyes was Lois lying like one dead on the floor.

Despite the fact that she was an invalid, Miss Harris's nerves were exceedingly cool. She did not shriek out, or call excitedly to the other inmates of the house, but went about reviving the girl by wetting her handkerchief with water as cold as it would run from the tap, and laying her

marble-cold face with it, and afterwards rubbing her hands briskly.

She was rewarded at length by seeing the great dark eyes slowly open, and the crimson tide of life drift back to the pale, cold cheeks and quivering lips.

A look of wonder filled Lois' eyes as she beheld Miss Harris bending over her.

"Was it a dream, some awful dream?" she said, excitedly, catching at her friend's hands and clinging piteously to them.

"What caused your sudden illness, Lois?" questioned Miss Harris, earnestly. "You were apparently well when I left you an hour since."

Still Lois clung to her with that awful look of agony in her beautiful eyes, but uttering no word.

"Has she gone?" she murmured, at length.

"Has who gone?" questioned Miss Harris, wondering what she meant.

"The beautiful pitiless stranger," sobbed Lois, catching her breath.

Miss Harris believed that the girl's mind was wandering, and refrained from further questioning her.

"The poor child is grieving so over this coming marriage of hers to Horace Fane that I almost fear her mind is giving way," she thought, in intense alarm, glancing at Lois.

As she did so, Lois began to sob again, breaking into such a passionate fit of weeping, and suffering such apparently intense grief, that Miss Harris was at a loss what to do or say.

She would not tell why she was weeping so bitterly; no amount of questioning could elicit from her what had happened.

Not for worlds would Lois have told to any human being her sad story—of the stranger's visit and the startling disclosures she had made to her.

It was not until Lois found herself locked securely in the seclusion of her own room that she dared look the matter fully in the face, and then the grief to which she abandoned herself was more poignant than before.

She had believed in Philip Desmond; she had trusted in his love, had longed for it as the flower longs for the cooling dews of Heaven; she had faith in him as the angels have faith in the God they love, and now the god she had made an idol of had turned to clay before her eyes, her dream crumbled, and all the sweet romance that had been awakened in her nature was rudely blasted.

Her heart had gone out to the young doctor with the one love of her life—a love such as comes to a woman but once—a love that awakened her soul to the grand possibilities of life.

He had folded her in his arms and kissed her, and the memory of that passionate kiss would linger in her heart, until she died—ay, until the shadows of the world grew so dark about her that the past appeared as a blank and all earthly love was over.

He had laughed about her, derided her to his companions, boasted that he had gained her heart, and cared nothing for it! Oh, was ever sorrow so bitter!

In her great grief, a terrible thought came to her. Why not end it all! Surely God would forgive her for laying down life's cross when it was too heavy to be borne.

Yes, that is what she would do. She would end it all.

Her father did not care for her; it caused him no grief to barter her, as the price of his secret, to Horace Fane, whom she loathed.

It lacked but one day to that marriage she so detested.

Yes, she would end it all before the morrow's sun rose.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

MISS HARRIS noticed that Lois was strangely silent and preoccupied during the remainder of that day; but she attached no particular importance to it.

She knew that the girl was wearing her heart out and brooding over the coming marriage. Horace Fane refused to be bought off, and Lois

herself declared that it must take place. She, alas! knew why!

Miss Harris had done her best to persuade John Davis to take Lois away—to America—ay, to the furthest end of the world, where Horace Fane could not find them, declaring that she would raise the money to defray their travelling expenses.

John Davis shook his head.

"There is no part of the world to which we could go that he would not find us," he muttered, burying his face in his shaking hands. "But we will speak no more about it. It is unmanly to think what would happen were—" and he stopped short.

He had often heard Miss Harris make allusion to money she could lay her hand on at any moment; but the old basket-maker never believed her. He fancied that the poor woman had a sort of mania that she was possessed of means which she could lay her hand on at any moment, and all she said on the subject he considered as but visionary, and paid no attention to it whatever.

Poor Miss Harris was in despair. What could she do to save Lois? She worried so over the matter that by evening she had so severe a headache that she was obliged to retire to her room and lie down.

John Davis had drunk himself into insensibility early in the evening, and Lois, sick at heart, alone, wretched, and desolate, was left by herself to look the dread future in the face.

The girl had reached a point where longer endurance was impossible. The man whom she loved had been only deceiving her with his protestations of affection; he had laughed with his companions at the kisses he had bestowed on her sweet lips; and she abhorred the man who was to claim her on the morrow as the price of her father's liberty.

No wonder the world looked dark to the poor girl, and there seemed nothing in the future worth living for.

As the hours dragged by, Lois had made up her mind what to do.

The little clock on the mantelpiece chimed the midnight hour as she arose from her low seat by the window, and putting on her hat, she glided from the wretched room that had been home to her all her dreary life.

Owing to the lateness of the hour, she encountered few people on the streets. There was no one to notice who she was or whither she went, save the old night-porter of the building.

"Poor child!" he muttered, thoughtfully, looking after the retreating figure; "she's going out to hunt for that drunken old scapegrace of a father, I'll warrant. It's dangerous for a free young girl with a face like hers to be on the streets alone at this hour of the night. I've told the old basket-maker so scores of times, but somehow he does not seem to realise her great danger."

Thus he tried to dismiss the matter from his mind; but as the hours rolled by, and he did not see her return with her old father, he began to be anxious. Surely they must have come round the corner when he was the further and of his beat.

The dawn was just breaking pink and golden through the eastern sky, when, walking slowly up the street, he beheld the old basket-maker emerge from the house and rush madly toward him.

"Something has happened!" he gasped, his face white and purple in streaks, while he held his hand clutched tightly over his heart. "Something awful has happened!" he groaned.

"Concerning your pretty young daughter?" asked the night-porter, with a strange mingling in his heart as he uttered the words.

The old basket-maker nodded.

"Yes," he sobbed, breaking into the wildest lamentations. "Lois—my beautiful Lois, has gone. This was to have been her wedding day, and she has fled! She went last night, and I—oh! oh!"

He could say no more, his grief was so intense.

"I will do what I can to help you find her," the porter said, huskily. "I saw your daughter



leave here last night, but I thought she was in search of you. You know I have seen her go out upon that errand many and many a time, when other young girls of her age were in their beds."

The old man tore his hair in the intensity of his anguish.

"For Heaven's sake, don't throw that in my face!" he cried. "I'm sorry enough for it now. If I only got Lois back again, I will never drink another drop as long as I live. But which way did she go?"

The night-porter pointed out the direction, and they looked in each other's white set faces for fully a minute.

"That way leads to the river?" whispered the old basket-maker, trembling like an aspen-leaf.

His companion nodded. He could not put into words the fear that had come to him. It was the hour when he left duty, and he went with John Davis to the river front to make inquiries.

Yes, several men had seen a young girl, a tall, slender figure, hurrying along one of the piers a little after midnight. But in the great city no one paused to look after her, or stopped to think, or to care what her mission might be.

The old basket-maker sent for Horace Fane, and there on the pier told him what had occurred.

His rage was something horrible to behold, and his curses caused even the old dock-rats and half-drunken tars to open their eyes in astonishment.

At last a man was found who had seen a woman leap into the water. He could not swim, and he had made no attempt to hurry down to the pier and try to save her.

"I told you she would bear watching," cried Horace Fane, pacing up and down the dock like an enraged lion. "And on this very night, of all others, you relaxed your vigilance," then he stopped short. "Perhaps she is hiding somewhere, after giving out the idea that she intended to drown herself," he said. "I will spend one week searching for her. I will even have the river dragged, and if I don't find her, Heaven help you, that's all I have to say!"

John Davis cowered beneath his threat, and it was as much as the night-porter could do, as Fane strode away, to prevent the old basket-maker from springing into the water, as he pitifully declared Lois had done, and end his miserable existence.

Miss Harriette's grief at the disappearance of the fair, hapless young girl, whom she had learned to love so dearly, was intense. She blamed herself bitterly that she had not insisted upon bearing Lois company on that night, when she appeared so despondent.

She remembered how she had found her lying prone upon her face in a swoon.

It was strange, when the inmates of the house learned of Lois's mysterious disappearance, that they never thought of mentioning the visit of the handsomely-attired stranger that morning. Had they done so, they might have made a most important discovery.

As John Davis surmised, Lois had gone directly to the river. The night was warm and sultry, and late as the hour was, the old pier, which was a breathing-spot for so many of the great city's hapless unfortunates, swarmed with men and women—say, even little children.

Lois drew down her dark veil, and waited until the people should go away. She was dressed in dark clothes, and sat so silently she attracted no particular attention; not even when she leaned over and looked longingly into the eddying waves.

The girl sitting close in the shadow of one of the recesses was not observed by the few stragglers strolling past.

One o'clock sounded from some far-off tower clock; then the half-hour struck.

Lois rose slowly to her feet, and looked back at the lights of the great city that she was leaving.

There would be no one to miss her; no one to weep over her untimely fate; no one to grieve that she had taken the fatal step to eternity.

Her father would be glad that there was no one to follow his step by night and by day, and

plead with the wine-sellers to give him no more drink. He would rejoice that he could follow his own will, and drink as much as he pleased.

There was no dear old mother whose heart would break; no gentle sister or brother who would never forget her; no husband to mourn for her; no little child to hold out its hands to the blue sky, and cry to her to come back. No one would miss her on the face of the earth.

Alas! poor Lois, how little she knew that at that very hour the man whose love she craved most was wearing his very heart out for love of her.

Lois took but one hurried glance backward; then, with a sobbing cry, sprang over the parapet and into the dark, seething waters.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

WHEN Philip Desmond left town he had expected to be gone a week, possibly a fortnight; but, owing to an unexpected turn in the business he was transacting, he was enabled to settle it in a day or so, and return to London.

The train was due at midnight, and he decided to walk home, passing over one of the bridges across the Thames.

Doctor Desmond was not in a hurry, and he walked leisurely over the bridge, pausing to look at the lights on the water.

He felt just in the mood to pause there and enjoy what comfort he could find in a good cigar. He was just about to light a cigar, when his gaze was suddenly attracted towards a slender object—the figure of a woman leaning over the parapet.

She was in the shadow cast by a large post; but he knew from the position in which she sat, that she must be looking intently into the water.

He did not like the steady gaze with which she seemed to be looking downward, and the young doctor determined to watch her. He drew back into the shadow, and refrained from lighting his cigar.

If she would but change her dangerous position he would call out to her; and he wondered where was a policeman who was supposed to be on beat there and prevent accidents of this kind.

While he was pondering over this matter, the figure rose suddenly to its feet, and he readily surmised from its slender, graceful build, which was but dimly outlined that she must be a young girl.

What was she doing there at that unseemly hour? Watching for some sailor lover whose ship was bearing him to her from over the great dark sea, or was she watching for a brother or father?

He had little time to speculate on this theme, however, for the next instant a piteous cry broke from the girl's lips—a cry in a voice strangely familiar, a cry that sent the blood bounding through his heart like an electric shock—and before he could take a step forward to prevent it, the slender figure had sprung over the parapet.

By the time Philip Desmond reached the spot where she had been sitting, the dark waters had closed over her head, a few eddying ripples only marking the spot where she had gone down.

In an instant Doctor Desmond tore off his coat and sprang into the water to the rescue. When he rose to the surface, looking eagerly about for the young girl whom he was risking his life to save, he saw a white face appear on the surface. He struck out toward it, but ere he reached the spot, it sank. Again he dived, and yet again, a great fear oppressing him that his efforts would be in vain, when he saw the white face go down for the third and last time.

With a mighty effort Doctor Desmond dived again. This time his hands struck something. He grasped it firmly. It was a tightly clenched little hand.

Up through the water he bore the slender form, and struck out for the shore with his burden.

Doctor Desmond was an expert swimmer, but it was with the utmost difficulty that he suc-

ceeded in reaching the pier, owing to the swell caused by the many steamboats passing. But it was accomplished at last, and almost on the verge of exhaustion himself, he succeeded in effecting a landing and laying his burden upon the pier.

"She's half drowned as it is," he muttered, bending closer to look at the pallid face under the flickering light of the gas-lamp.

As his eyes rested upon the girl's face, a mighty cry broke from his lips, and he staggered back as though a terrible blow had been dealt him.

"Great heavens! It is Lois," he gasped.

The discovery fairly stunned him—took his breath away. Then he remembered that the girl was dying; that every instant of time was precious if he would save her.

He worked over her as though his life were at stake, and his efforts were rewarded at last when the dark eyes opened languidly.

"Lois," he cried, kneeling beside her on the pier, his voice husky with emotion, "why did you do this terrible deed! Speak, my love, my darling!"

And almost before he was aware of it, he had clasped her to his heart, and was raining passionate kisses on the cheek, neck, and pale cold lips of the girl he had loved better than life.

She did not seem to realise what had transpired; she did not recognise him.

"Do not take me home," she sobbed, incoherently, over and over again. "Anywhere but there. He—he—will kill me!"

These words alarmed Doctor Desmond greatly. What could they mean? He knew full well that this must have been the last thought that crossed her brain ere she took the fatal leap, or it would not have been the first one to flash across her mind when returning to consciousness.

He saw, too, that she was getting into a delirium, and that she must be removed with all possible haste.

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He did not know of Miss Harris being in her home, and he reasoned with himself that there was no one to take care of her there, save the old basket-maker, and she could not have a worse companion in her present condition; therefore, he must take her elsewhere.

Then it occurred to him that a very excellent nurse—a widow whom he had often recommended to his patients—must live very near that vicinity, and he determined to take her there, and then go after her father and bring him to her.

There was an old hack jostling by. Philip hailed it, and placing Lois within, took a place by her side. In a few moments they were at their destination.

The old nurse was always expecting a summons to go to some patient; but she was quite dumb-founded to see who her caller was at that strange hour, and to see he held an unconscious young girl in his arms.

Philip explained the situation to the old nurse.

"I will not come again for a fortnight, nurse," he said, unsteadily, on leaving. "That will be best under the circumstances. She may be ill, but not in danger. I will send her father to her in the meantime."

"What an honourable man Philip Desmond is!" thought the nurse, admiringly. "Not every man could have the strength of mind to keep away from the girl he loved, even if he was bound to another."

Doctor Desmond dared not take even another glance at Lois, his heart was throbbing so madly, but turned and hurried from the house, and re-entering the cab, drove rapidly away.

He had planned to go directly to John Davis; but on second thought he concluded to wait until morning.

It would be a salutary lesson to the old basket-maker to miss Lois, and realise how much he depended upon the young girl for his happiness.

This was a fatal resolve for him to reach, as will be plainly seen.

As soon as he had finished his breakfast he hurried to the tenement house.

There was no commotion outside; evidently the neighbours had not heard of Lois's disappearance, and he doubted whether or not her father knew of it yet.

Philip Desmond had barely stepped from the pavement into the dark and narrow hall-way ere he found himself face to face with Fane.

The Doctor would have passed him by with a haughty nod; but with one leap Fane was at his side, his strong hands closing around his throat, while he cried out, in a voice fairly convulsed with passion:

"Aha! You have walked right into my net, and at the right moment. Where is Lois? She fled from me last night, and went directly to your arms, of course. Tell me where she is, that I may go to her and wreak my vengeance upon her! Answer me quickly, or I will kill you!"

Philip Desmond was surprised for an instant; but it was only for an instant. In the next, he had recovered himself.

"You cur, to take a man at a disadvantage like that!" he cried, adding, as he swung out his muscular right arm, "but as you have brought this upon yourself I will give you enough of it!"

Two or three ringing blows showed Fane that bull's though he was, he had met his match in this white-handed aristocrat.

He drew back, uttering a peculiar sharp whistle, and two men, who were evidently in his employ, advanced quickly to Fane's aid.

"Bind and gag this fellow!" he commanded, "and throw him down into the wine-cellar to await my coming! He's a thief. He has just stolen my pocket-book. Quick, my lads, don't listen to what he says!"

(To be continued)

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It is argued by many philosophical writers of the day that there never again can be a long war. The facilities of modern communication, the improvements in arms, and, above all, the mighty interests of modern commerce, forbid in the opinion of these writers, the possibility of such a deplorable event. Let us devoutly hope that the conclusion is just. Human passions, however, when thoroughly aroused, cannot readily be governed by rules of policy. It will not do, however, to trust too much to modern civilisation as a preventative of protracted and vindictive war. The taste of blood that converts the tamed tiger into a sanguinary monster has pretty much the same effect upon civilised and Christian man. The latter, it is true, makes his onslaughts under certain rules and regulations, and gives quarter to his prostrate and bleeding foe. But let the war last long enough, and even the chivalry and mercy that should mitigate its horrors will at last be forgotten. The true way to prevent a long war is to make a strong war. Every overwhelming blow is a mercy stroke. In a short-time combat, when one party has no hope of victory, he cries "enough," and as it is with man the individual, so it is with aggregates of men. The policy, the true Christian policy, in war, is to smite irresistibly and then tender the olive branch with brotherly hand.

The fire departments in China are considered very effective even by strangers to that land, and it may be they are when the construction of Chinese dwellings and buildings is taken into account. There is scarcely a house there over two stories high. But even for houses of that diminutive height the Chinese methods of fighting fires must appear very crude compared to the English system. In the larger cities of China there are stationed throughout their length and breadth fire watchmen. Upon bamboo poles is built a sentry box with a narrow balcony circling. These sentry boxes are stationed at regular intervals, and in each one a watchman is on duty day and night. The instant signs of fire appear in his district he sounds the alarm either by voice or by a gong, and the dread cry is at once hastened along to the nearest fire-engine house. In these houses, which are none too numerous, are kept hand engines somewhat like the most antique type known in this country. They are dragged out by running Chinamen at the alarm, and rushed off with really creditable swiftness to the scene of the fire, where the engine "pipes" are put in connection with the nearest canal. These canals are so numerous throughout the large cities that one is nearly always within reasonable distance of a fire. If there be not one near, a well or cistern is utilised as the source of water supply. There is little organisation in a Chinese fire department, but the crowd that gathers lends a willing hand, and can usually extinguish a fire in the building in which it originated. Should the flames get beyond control, however, there is a precaution which the Chinese alone of all nations have adopted to prevent its extensive spread. At frequent intervals in the crowded part of the cities firewalls of brick have been built. These walls include fixed areas, beyond which no flames can travel. Besides these engine houses and firewalls, in the city of Canton at least, one or two stationary engines are maintained near central points upon the banks of canals, for use in case of fire. From these engines iron pipes run over the roofs of neighbouring houses for some distance, and from the frequent outlets along the line of pipes water can be distributed upon threatened points.

## EPPS'S COCOAINE

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## ALEX. ROSS'S SKIN TIGHTENER OR TONIC.

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## NOSE MACHINE.

This is a contrivance by which the short cartilage of the nose is pressed into shape by wearing the instrument an hour daily for a short time. Price 10s. 6d., sent free for stamps.—ALEX. ROSS, 63, Theobald's Road, London, opposite Bedford Row. Established 1850. Parcel free from observation.

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## FACETIE.

TEACHER: "Boys, what is a napkin?" Bobble: "Something we use when we have company."

"I ALWAYS tell my wife everything that happens." Venerable Diplomatist: "And I tell my wife things that never happen."

"WOULD you marry a woman who couldn't cook?" "In a minute—if she didn't think she could cook."

WAGG: "What are you doing now?" Verisopht: "Oh, I'm living by brain-work." Wagg: "Whose?"

"DE VREE is a thorough aristocrat, isn't he?" "Yes; he has such a well-bred way of not listening when you say anything to him."

HE: "What would you think, dear, if I should say you were a harp of a thousand strings?" SHE: "I should think that you were a lyre."

SMITH: "I hear that your mother-in-law is dangerously ill." Captain Spurr: "She is rather seedy; but she is not as dangerous as when she was well."

GLOBETROTTE: "Did you ever travel on a personally conducted tour?" Mr. Meeks: "Often." Globetrotte: "Whom did you have for manager, usually?" Mr. Meeks: "My wife."

MRS. WILKINS: "Have you called on your new neighbours yet?" Mrs. Gilkins: "No; I have been waiting to see their first washing hung out on the line."

TYRES: "Have you named your boy yet?" Spokes: "No; my wife and I can't agree. She wants to name him after her bicycle, and I want to name him after mine."

MR. POMPU: "I am wholly a self-made man." Miss Pert: "Too bad you made such an awful mistake!" Mr. Pompu: "How? what?" Miss Pert: "In not selecting better raw material!"

HE: "Have you heard my new song, 'The Proposal'?" SHE: "No; what key is it in?" "Be mine-er." "I will. And now you can transpose it to the key A flat."

PUEL (little girl): "Please, sir, this is not my ink." Teacher: "Isn't it?" "No, sir." "Isn't that your inkstand?" "Yes, but it is not my ink." "How do you know?" "Well, it don't taste right."

"JOHNIE," said a mother to her six-year-old son, "is it possible that I overheard you teaching the parrot to swear?" "No, mamma," replied Johnie; "I was just telling it what it mustn't say."

"It is the nature of a child to be wanting to do something," said the enthusiastic kindergarten. "As far as I have noticed," said the mother of six, "it is the nature of a child to want to do something else."

PROUD DAME: "I do not see how you could think of marrying into such a commonplace family as that." Romantic Daughter: "Oh, I'm not going to marry into his family; he's going to marry into our family."

MOTHER (reading): "Every name means something. Charley means brave, Philip means fond; what does Jack mean?" Daughter (who is also reading): "Oh, Jack! Why, he means business! He told me so last night."

MISTRESS: "Bridget, this is altogether too much; you have a new follower in the kitchen every week." Bridget: "Well, ma'am, you see, the food in this house is so bad that no one will come here for longer than a week."

A COUNTRYWOMAN who had married a rather worthless fellow, on being asked why she had made such a bad bargain, replied: "Doan ye see, sur, I'd got as much warshin' an' I was forced to see it ome, so if I 'ad na had he, I must 'a bought a donkey."

"PAPA," said the boy, "when you say in your advertisement that your goods are acknowledged by connoisseurs to be the best, what do you mean by connoisseurs?" "A connoisseur, my boy," answered the great manufacturer, "is an eminent authority—an authority, in short, who admits that our goods are the best."

"YEs," said Miss Passaigh. "I enjoy the society of Mr. Airyland. He keeps me interested. He is always saying something that one never hears from anybody else." "Really!" rejoined Miss Cayenne. "Has he been proposing to you, too?"

"YOU'LL place your umbrella or cane at the dure, sir," said the new Irish attendant at the picture gallery. "Very proper regulation," said the visitor; "but as it happens I have neither." "Then go and get one. No one is allowed to enter unless he leaves his cane or umbrella at the dure. You may read the card yourself, sir."

"THE man I refused," she said, softly, "is now rich, while the man I accepted is poor." "Of course," replied her dearest friend, "it would be just the same if you had married the other." The young matron could readily see that this was a reflection upon her, but it was two days before she was able to see in just what way, and even then she wasn't sure of it.

OLD Colonel —, whose phenomenal stinginess has earned him a most unenviable reputation, was riding to the regimental parade-ground. Suddenly his horse, evidently in a very weak condition, stumbled and fell. "I have tried all sorts of physios," growled the colonel to a sympathetic brother officer, "and they haven't done the poor beast any good." "Colonel," inquired the officer, with a naughty twinkle in his eye, "did you ever try oats?"

MYRTLE: "What do you think? I've had three proposals in as many days, and, oh, dear! I'm in such a quandary. I don't know which one to accept." Addie: "Oh, take them all, and make sure. May be possible that one of them really means it."

"I have to assist Johnny with his mental arithmetic every evening," said the young woman, "and it is a nuisance." "Do you—er find that celebrated problem about one plus one equals one?" asked the young man. "I said mental arithmetic, not sentimental!" replied the young woman with great dignity.

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**BUGS FLEAS MOTHS BEETLES**

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## SOCIETY.

THE Duchess of York will present the prizes on Commemoration Day (July 11th), at the Princess Mary Village Homes, Addlestone.

THE Duke of York's command of the *Crescent* is to last for three months only. Not only this, but the programme of her cruise is not yet settled.

Two magnificent candelabra from the Royal Porcelain Manufactory at Berlin were sent to the Queen by the German Emperor and Empress at birthday presents.

It is rumoured in the South of Ireland that the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire are making arrangements for a visit in the autumn from the Duke and Duchess of York to them at Lismore Castle, Waterford.

THE Princess of Wales and Princess Victoria will leave England early in August, after the Cowes regatta week, on a visit to the Duke and Duchess of Cumberland at their château on the Trian Sea, in Upper Austria, and they intend to spend the months of September and October in Denmark.

THE Queen has at last been pleased, by letters patent under the Great Seal, to declare that the children of the eldest son of any Prince of Wales shall have, and at all times hold and enjoy, the style, title, or attribute of "Royal Highness."

THE Grand Duke and Grand Duchess of Hesse are on a visit to the Duke and Duchess of Coburg at Schloss Rosenau, near Coburg, and will make that place their headquarters during the next six or seven weeks, the Duchess having given up her projected trip to England. Rosenau, which is the birthplace of Prince Albert, is an old hunting-seat about four miles from Coburg, and is quite buried in the woods.

THE Prince and Princess of Naples will shortly proceed on a three months' trip abroad. They will first go to Cettinje, where the Princess has not been since her marriage, and afterwards to Russia on a visit to her sisters, the Grand Duchess Peter (Militsa) and the Duchess of Leuchtenberg (Anastasia). Their Royal Highnesses will also be the guests of the Tsar and Tsarina at Peterhof for a few days, the Prince and his Majesty being on terms of personal friendship.

THE Princess of Wales and Princess Victoria frequently visit their invalid dogs at the Sandringham Kennels. Her Royal Highness, like the Prince and all the members of their family, is very fond of dogs, and quite a connoisseur, and the kennels represent quite one of the most notable features of the Prince's Norfolk home. The Princess is a keen sympathiser with her sick pets, and a by no means ineffectual adviser as to their treatment when illness or accident overtakes them.

It is rumoured at Vienna that there is to be a grand hunting party in September at Belye, the magnificent domain of the Archduke Frederick in Hungary, including the Emperor of Austria, the King of Saxony, the Prince of Wales, the Crown Prince of Denmark, and the Duke of Cumberland. The Emperor William was splendidly entertained last year at Belye, which is one of the finest sporting estates in Hungary. The Archduke Frederick, who is the eldest brother of the Queen Regent of Spain, inherited the vast estates, mines, and forests of his uncle, the Archduke Albert, the settled property which passed to him being valued at over a hundred millions of marks.

In honour of the Emperor of Austria's Jubilee the famous old city clock of Olmitz, where it will be remembered, the Emperor ascended the Tarone on the Court having been driven from Vienna in 1848, has been set going again at great outlay after seventy-five years of inactivity. It is a curious old time-piece, and of so quaint and complicated a mechanism that it has taxed the brain of many a master of the craft. One Hans Pohl was its ingenious maker as far back as 1422, and one hundred and fifty years later Pohl's great-grandson undertook its repair.

## STATISTICS.

ZOOLOGISTS say that all known species of wild animals are gradually diminishing in size.

THE weight of the Greenland whale is 100 tons, which is equal to that of 83 elephants or 440 bears.

It is estimated that two years is the average sickness experienced by a person before the age of 70.

BETWEEN the years 1685 and 1889 Britain's increase in naval strength was 37 per cent., that of France 42 per cent., Russia's 71 per cent., and Germany doubled the number of its warships.

EVIDENCES of the prehistoric peoples who inhabited the valleys of the Gila and the salt rivers in America are continually coming to light, revealing the fact that in these valleys once dwelt a prosperous people, numbering probably not less than 3,000,000.

## GEMS.

EVERY promise we break makes a weak place in the self-respect which is our strong defence against life's existing evil.

A MAN seldom forgives an injury until after he has availed himself of an opportunity to get even.

SUCCESS is costly. We find we have pledged the better part of ourselves to clutch it; not to be redeemed with the whole handful of our prize.

MANLINESS is not measured by the calendar. Thoughts, aspirations and conduct, and not years, make a man. One may be a man at fifteen, or a child at thirty.

THE memory is the mind's storehouse. Put only good goods into it. Each day add some useful bit of information to your stock of knowledge, and grow wise as you grow old.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

FOAMY APPLES.—Take five tart apples, remove the cores and fill in with butter and sugar. Cut the skin in three or four places and turn back the peel nicely. They will look like tulip leaves when baked. Put a little hot water in the pan, bake in a moderate oven.

FROZEN STRAWBERRIES.—Prepare a custard with about a pint of milk and ten eggs, and sugar to taste. Add to this a quart of strawberries crushed, and pass the whole through a sieve, then place the mixture over ice and work in with it a small quantity of cream and syrup. When smooth pack in ice for two hours.

STEWED KIDNEY.—Prepare a moderate-sized beef kidney by removing all the fat and fibre; place in boiling water in a porcelain kettle and boil slowly for about half an hour, then cut in small pieces and place in a double boiler; cover with milk; add a tablespoonful of butter, and thicken with flour until about the consistency of custard. Season with salt and pepper, add a little chopped parsley, and serve with boiled rice.

PRINCESS SOUP.—Fry two onions in two tablespoonfuls of butter; when tender, dust two tablespoonfuls of flour over them. Bring a quart of milk to a boiling point, and drop the onions in, letting them boil for one-quarter of an hour together. Strain out the onions now and add two tablespoonfuls of grated cheese, a dash of cayenne, one teaspoonful of salt. Break two eggs, beat well, adding a half-cup of the cold milk, saved out for this purpose, and add this gradually to the boiling soup; then set on the back of the stove to keep hot, not cook.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

It has been ascertained that plate-glass will make a more durable monument than the hardest granite.

A LIFEBOAT made of pumice-stone has been tested. It continued afloat with a load even when full of water.

RUSSIAN families, when moving to new homes, kindle the fire on the hearth with coals brought from the old residence.

DUSTLESS roads are to be made possible by a new material, composed of a fine earthy or mineral matter charged with heavy oil, placed on the levelled bed of ordinary roads.

An apron is the Royal Standard of Persia. Gos, a Persian, who was a blacksmith by trade, raised a revolt which proved successful, and his leather apron, covered with jewels, is still borne in the van of Persian armies.

"HUNGER stones" have been seen in the Rhine this winter. They appear only when the water is very low, and the date of their appearance is then cut into them. They are believed to forbode a year of bad crops.

An American professor asserts that he can prove that coral islands are not built up from the bottom, but are formed by a comparatively thin crust on the tops of submerged mountains at points where the ocean is comparatively shallow.

SHOWERS of fish and frogs are tolerably well authenticated. The living creatures were probably taken from their native element by a cyclone or waterspout, were transported through the air and finally dropped with the rain.

ONE of the strangest streams in the world is in East Africa. It flows in the direction of the sea, but never reaches it. Just north of the equator, and when only a few miles from the Indian Ocean, it flows into a desert, where it suddenly and completely disappears.

A REMARKABLE plant has recently been discovered in New Guinea. It is green-leaved with spikes of gorgeous crimson flowers, twenty to thirty inches long, and as thick as an ordinary walking-stick. A specimen was lately exhibited in London.

THE most magnificent tomb in the world is deemed to be the palace Temple of Karnak, occupying a space of nine acres, or twice that of St. Peter's at Rome. The temple space is a poet's dream of gigantic columns, beautiful courts, and wondrous avenues of sphinxes.

THE eggs of the terrapin are hatched in about thirty days. With her forepaws the female terrapin scratches a hole in the sand, and in it places her eggs—from thirteen to nineteen. She then covers them, and relies upon the sun to do the hatching.

AN inventor has hit upon a method of putting stone soles on boots and shoes. He mixes a water-proof glue with a suitable quantity of clean quartz sand, and spreads it over the leather sole used as a foundation. These quartz soles are said to be very flexible, and practically indestructible.

COMBINATIONS of linseed, peanut, rape or mustard oil with sulphur form rubber-like substances which are said to be largely used in the manufacture of india-rubber compounds. Pure, unvulcanised india-rubber will float, nearly submerged, in water, while the oil substitutes, being slightly heavier in proportion to their bulk, sink.

PRICELESS treasures of all sorts are still hidden away in the old convents and monasteries of Venice. Not the least interesting among these are the ancient manuscripts. One of these, which has just come to light, is of special interest. In it an envoy from Candia, who came to Venice in 1542, describes day-by-day life under the Venetian Republic, and one of the most interesting parts of this historic document is an account of the life of the Moor of Venice, who was known to the writer. Othello arriving in the town of the doges, his military career, his marriage, his departure for Cyprus, and his end are all set down, with many details.



## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

**J. R. O.**—Addresses are never given.  
**BAYTON.**—Hawarden is pronounced Ha'den.  
**JONORANT T. D.**—Not compulsory but customary.  
**MARSH.**—Evening dress, with or without a flower.  
**C. D.**—Legal questions are not answered through this column.  
**L. F.**—We do not supply recipes for commercial purposes.  
**UNRECORDED.**—It could only be done by executing a fresh will.  
**X.**—He retains the right to dispose of his property as he pleases.  
**PRATT.**—We have no means of knowing the amount of his fortune.  
**VERVE.**—A bit of glue dissolved in skim milk will restore craps.  
**AMBITIOUS.**—The best way would be to attend an elementary class.  
**J. J.**—If there is no will, the freehold property goes entirely to the eldest son.  
**JACK TAR.**—Tattoo marks cannot be removed except by taking away the skin.  
**YOUNG MOTORS.**—Vaccination is compulsory throughout the United Kingdom.  
**JOHNBO.**—There were no Englishmen engaged in Nansen's Polar expedition.  
**VIRGINIA.**—Run a feather dipped in oil and turpentine down their windpipes.  
**LOCUSTA.**—Consult a skilful aural surgeon; you cannot do it properly yourself.  
**MAJOR.**—A man or woman is said to "come of age" on the twenty-first birthday.  
**VERY TROUBLED.**—It is too tangled an affair as you state it to be dealt with here.  
**GARCIE.**—The one rule in all matters of social etiquette is, be natural and you are safe.  
**EXPERIENCED.**—The registrar of the district in which you reside will tell you how to proceed.  
**A NEW READER.**—You should apply at once to the most eminent surgeon in your neighbourhood.  
**LATVENS.**—If your flat-irons are rough rub them with fine salt, and it will make them perfectly smooth.  
**NIMMO.**—Nickel-plating is just electro-plating with nickel, a metal which has many of the qualities of silver.  
**VIOLET.**—No length of separation between man and wife will authorize either to marry again in the lifetime of the other.  
**FRANK.**—The two biggest fire-engines in the world are in Liverpool; they can throw 1,000 gallons of water a minute, and a jet 140 feet high.  
**ANNOY HUSBAND.**—You had better give notice to the individual tradesman dealt with that you will not be responsible for debts contracted by your wife.

## NEXT WEEK WILL APPEAR

The first instalment of an original and highly interesting Serial Story, entitled

## THE WOLF'S MOUTH

By a well-known Author, whose Stories have not previously appeared in our columns.

**EVANSON.**—A wife can start business in her own name at any time, even under the circumstances you mention—in fact she can go so far as to make her husband her manager should she wish to do so.

**META.**—A promise of marriage, either verbal or in writing, cannot be enforced. Marriage is a voluntary contract. But the promise, when broken, forms the ground of an action for damages, the only remedy allowed by the law.

**AUNT SARAH.**—If not too much soiled well rub with powdered chalk, which should be carefully sifted free from anything gritty, and mixed with an equal quantity of stale white bread crumbs. This will not restore the faded portions.

**ENGINEERING LIFE.**—A young man conversant with the higher branches of arithmetic, with a knowledge of mathematics, and being a good draughtsman, should endeavour to get a situation with a surveyor, builder, railway contractor, or engineer.

**ANGLO-AMERICAN.**—Since the Declaration of Independence the United States have had five wars, not counting the little differences with the Indians. These were the war of the Revolution, the war of 1812, the war with the Barbary States, the Mexican war, and the war for the Union.

**A CORRESPONDENT.**—The stain may be removed by washing out with hot soap water containing a little chlorine water, then rinse in water containing a little ammonia dipped in a solution of hyposulphite of soda, then in a solution of tartaric acid, and finally wash out in clean hot water, but if you have not a strong dye to work upon it will probably go along with the stain.

**A THIRTY SOUL.**—Perhaps the best thing to do to get grease out of velvet is to pour turpentine over the spot, and rub carefully with a piece of flannel till it is removed, repeating the application of turpentine as often as may be necessary. To restore velvet, cover a hot smoothing iron with a wet cloth, and hold the velvet firmly over it. The vapour arising will raise the pile of the velvet with a little judicious brushing.

**A HAPPY MAN.**—The most approved engagement ring is one with a setting. Of course, the diamond ranks first in popularity, then other stones may be used, either singly or in a cluster. Almost any jeweller will advise you as to the most favoured styles. It is always well to follow somewhat after the customs that prevail in your part of the country. Rings with settings are universally worn, and if properly made never injure the gloves that are worn over them. The engagement ring is worn on the third finger of the left hand.

**KLOHETER.**—The best protection against cold, in the way of garments, is that afforded by the skin of the reindeer. With the addition of a thick blanket, the reindeer skin enables the wearer to resist the severest cold of the Arctic regions.

**HOUSE-KEEPER.**—Lukewarm soft water, with a little household ammonia dropped into it, in the proportion of one-half tablespoonful to each pailful of water, will greatly facilitate the washing of lace curtains. Avoid rubbing, because it is likely to injure the threads. Press and squeeze the curtains, add fine shaved soap to the water, and keep changing it as often as necessary. If the curtains are soiled enough to require boiling, place them loosely in a large white bag and they will be saved any possible injury.

**IN DESPAIR.**—We think you should try to study the young man, if you love him so distractedly, as you say you do. Try to learn what he likes and dislikes, and do the former and avoid the latter. If he loves you he will soon show it in unmistakable ways, and if he does not, you must try and nerve yourself to break off your attachment for him. This will be hard, no doubt, but it is an ordeal that many have to pass through. Perhaps, if you were to show him a little more plainly that you do not like his going so much with other girls, and also that you are equal to amusing and interesting him as a companion, you might bring about a more satisfactory state of affairs.

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